

**‘PUBLIC VOICES, PRIVATE VOICES: AN INVESTIGATION OF
THE DISCOURSES OF AGE AND GENDER AND THEIR
IMPACT ON THE SELF-IDENTITY OF AGEING WOMEN’**

by

CLARE HELEN ANDERSON

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Supervisor: Dr. Rosamund Moon

Department of English
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT
U.K

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates discourses of age and gender as realised in language used by and about ageing women, with a particular focus on the inseparable and reciprocal relationship between the private voices of individual lived experience of age(ing), and public discourses of ageing generated by the beauty and media industries. Research data collected and analysed for this thesis has three components: spoken data from 19 face-to-face qualitative interviews (the private voices), and a range of anti-ageing skincare and selected media texts (two forms of public discourse).

The primary focus for the research is mid-life women, (aged 42-56) transitioning between youth and old(er) age. Principal findings suggest that for them ageing is a complex, non-unitary process, influenced by powerful cultural discourses which idealise youthfulness and problematise ageing, delivering gendered aesthetic judgements which profoundly shape individual discourses and evaluations and can be tracked in specific language features. Appearance is the ‘dominant signifier of ageing’, its changes constantly monitored in daily “mirror moments” and negatively evaluated through comparative language of ‘pinnacle’ and ‘loss’ as pressure of the cultural lens on the personal gaze drives an obligation to conform to external expectations. Here, the intersection of ageing and gendered selves, mediated through the cultural/media mirror, is articulated through conflicting discourses of reluctant acceptance and anxious resistance, in a continuing process of self-evaluation made more complex by the external pressures of beauty discourses and ambivalent media. There are implications both for gender and linguistic studies, not least as age-related stereotypes are increasingly challenged by a growing community of baby-boomers transitioning through mid-life to old(er) age.

DEDICATION

I dedicate the work undertaken in this thesis to the women and men who volunteered to take part and made my research possible. I am – and always will be – profoundly grateful for their time, so generously given, and for sharing their private voices with me with such candour and honesty.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis reports on an investigation of discourses of age and gender as realised in the language used by and about ageing women. In this introductory chapter I outline in broad terms the nature and scope of the thesis and the research questions it seeks to address. I describe the cultural forces which provided its *raison d'être* as a scholarly undertaking, and the academic approaches which shaped my thinking and which are developed more fully in chapter 2.

Analysis in this thesis focuses on two discourse domains: the first is discourse at a macro level, exemplified by the following quotation in which the social commentator Rush Limbaugh's public speculation about Hillary Clinton represents a cultural lens on ageing womanhood:

"Does America... want to watch a woman of Mrs Clinton's age, age before their eyes in office?" (Rush Limbaugh, quoted in *The Sunday Times* 15th February 2015)

The second is language practice at an individual level, illustrated by this comment from a mid-life female participant in one of the interviews collected for this study, which expresses the complex action of the subjective gaze, simultaneously turning inwards in the evaluation of self and outwards in its judgements of others:

.... I feel they're [sc. colleagues] all so much younger and I'm kind of irrelevant but I do find outside that I notice quite a lot of attractive older men with white hair and I think there didn't used to be all these men with white hair... but I can see that you just didn't even see those people.... you become quite invisible [female participant, aged 56]

A changing social context has affected middle age in particular, reconceptualising this period of the lifecourse, pushing back its chronological boundaries (see 2.1.1 below). One consequence is that the trajectories of women's lives may be changing: for example, a greater number of women may be working for longer, so that more older women remain in the workplace, some of them occupying more senior/high status positions - although figures on representation of women at board level suggest that gender equality is still far from being achieved.¹ Whilst there is arguably a greater platform for older women in professional and public life, a central argument made in this thesis is that the greater visibility of older/ageing

¹ Research by Dr Jude Browne (Director of the University of Cambridge Centre for Gender Studies) shows that only 17.4% of directors of FTSE 350 companies are female (source: *Cambridge Alumni Magazine* October 2014 and www.gender.cam.ac.uk). Furthermore, cf. media "shock" at the failure of Jeremy Corbyn, the new leader of the Labour Party, to include any women amongst his top cabinet appointments (September 2015).

women highlights a fundamental paradox at the heart of cultural attitudes towards ageing women: even as it gives greater prominence to older women, current culture struggles to accommodate the reality of the ageing female body– as illustrated in the quotation about Clinton. There is also a profound effect on individual experience of ageing, as exemplified by the reflections of the 56 year-old woman quoted above, a phenomenon also observed in Hurd Clarke and Griffin’s study on beauty work as a response to ageing in which they conclude that for the women in their study

perceptions of invisibility were grounded in their acute visibility as old women. The possession of physical markers of ageing rendered the women more visible as objects of discrimination...(2008: 669)

The growing acknowledgement that this phenomenon affects many midlife women can be seen in the developing genre of autobiographical accounts of women’s midlife experiences e.g. Jane Shilling’s (2012) *The Stranger in the Mirror*, and India Knight’s (2014) *In Your Prime*. Furthermore, recent works such as Christine Bell’s (2012) book *Visible Women: Tales of Age, Gender and In/Visibility*, Jeanette King’s (2013) *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman* and Helen Walmsley-Johnson’s (2015) personal account *The Invisible Woman: Taking on the Vintage Years* suggests an increasing determination to tackle the fraught issue of the in/visibility conferred on ageing women, particularly by the media as the vehicle of cultural attitudes, for whom the issue of ageing women remains deeply problematic. Despite this increased engagement with women’s ageing, as King also argues, historically there has been a lack of attention to these issues by feminist theorists - Germaine Greer’s (1991) classic text *The Change* being one of few exceptions. Whilst there may be greater representation of older women in these public discourses, the way in which such representation is discursively constructed is often ambivalent and contradictory, with negative evaluations covertly expressed via linguistic and visual strategies designed to align readers with a particular attitudinal stance (see chapter 7 of this study).

Investigating discourses of age(ing) and gender is also an investigation of the ideologies which shape those discourses; the cultural theorist John Thompson argued that ideology and language are inextricably interconnected:

...to study ideology is, in some part and in some way to study language in the social world. It is to study the ways in which language is used in everyday social life, from the most mundane encounter between friends and family members to the most privileged forums of political debate (1984: 2)

He further stated that ‘the language of everyday life is regarded as the very *locus* of ideology’ (ibid: 99), arguing for the importance of analysing language in a way which also takes into account its role within the wider structure of society. Drawing on his approach, this thesis examines the operation of the private voices of the language of everyday life and of public discourses in order to understand the nature of the relationship between them.² The analysis of individual language in use focuses primarily on linguistic resources used by women as they construct and articulate gender and age identity in the context of ‘the texture of relevances that comprise the changing actual scenes of everyday life’ (Garfinkel 1964, (1984): 118). The investigation of public discourses critically engages with dominant cultural attitudes towards age, ageing and gender, which Margaret Morganroth Gullette describes as the ‘master narratives’ (1997: 9) - which could be said to have produced the assumptive question concerning Hillary Clinton - in order to uncover and understand their ‘ideological formations’ (Fairclough 2010: 42). Such ideological representations, as Fairclough and Thompson both argue, serve wider power structures; Thompson wrote ‘that to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination’ (1984: 131). Thus discourses of age and gender encode aspects of reality which reflect the interests of the social actors (i.e. institutions, media and brand corporations, individuals) in a specific social context. It could be argued that the two quotations shown above demonstrate a key aspect of the workings of ideology within the current cultural environment, which Fairclough describes as ‘naturalisation’ (2010: 31), whereby ideologies come to be received and evaluated as non-ideological, ‘common sense’ (ibid) formulations. Thus a principal aim of my thesis is to ‘denaturalise’ (ibid) the ideological discourses surrounding age/ing and gender and gain insight into their impact on individuals’ language.

The work reported on here has a theoretical starting point, following Thompson’s thinking (as above) and a linguistic one, drawing on the work of Michael Halliday, which is that language and social context are interrelated; as Halliday states:

By their everyday acts of meaning, people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and of knowledge (1978: 2)

² A more detailed working definition of discourse/s as the term is used in this study follows in 2.1 below.

My study also draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to explore this relationship further (see Fairclough 2010 and chapter 3 of this thesis); its critical starting point, the ‘social wrong’ in Fairclough’s terminology (2010: 235), is rooted in my own experience as a midlife woman of the continuing cultural problematisation of female ageing, in which the ageing female body is the particular focus of a cultural gaze which simultaneously scrutinises, polices and ultimately denies it, leaving no culturally endorsed pathway enabling women to construct an age identity with confidence. The research questions I have used to explore these issues are as follows:

- (i) How do women use language to evaluate their subjective experience of ageing and its impact on their appearance, specifically in terms of:
 - the criteria/standards against which they evaluate themselves
 - the nature and extent of the impact of public discourses of ageing on their own individual experience
 - the linguistic resources they use in order to construct self-identity as they age
- (ii) What insights can be derived from these articulations of the personal experience of ageing?
- (iii) How are ageing women represented by lifestyle media and branded advertising communication?
- (iv) What cultural insights may be gained from comparing the ways in which women are represented and evaluated in media and beauty/cosmetic discourses versus men?

The wide-ranging and complex nature of this investigation has demanded a breadth and diversity of datasets to draw from in order to achieve sufficiently broad yet detailed analysis of the intertwined relationship between what Fairclough describes as the ‘micro’ events (2010: 31) of individual language practice and the ‘macro’ discursive structures (ibid) of the wider cultural environment. These research questions are therefore explored through three datasets comprising different but related discourses of ageing and gender: spoken data from a series of qualitative interviews (i.e. the private voices of ageing); and a range of anti-ageing skincare advertisements and selection of media texts (i.e. the public voices of ageing).

Kathleen Woodward observes that ‘along with race, gender and age are the most salient markers of social difference’ (1999: x). However, it is generally accepted that theorisations

of ageing as a socio-cultural rather than a medical/biological phenomenon have lagged significantly behind critical engagement with gender (see Woodward 1999, 2006; Twigg 2010, see also 2.1 below), and consequently the reciprocal impact of gender and age(ing) at a linguistic level remains under-investigated and under-theorised, as the lack of a coherent body of background literature attests (see 2.0 below). The significance of what Sadie Wearing terms ‘the often unexamined links’ (2007: 284) between these two fundamental markers of identity is illustrated by evidence from the interview data gathered for my study, which suggests that understanding how the relationship between gender and age/ing is articulated by the real voices of lived experience is critical to real understanding of the complex personal impact of the ageing process, socially, emotionally and physically, and its diverse and heterogeneous nature. In focusing on the conjunction of discourses of gender and age/ing and examining how they structure each other ideologically and linguistically, my thesis aims to contribute principally to the field of language and gender studies, as well as seeking to add to emerging interest in ageing and gender more broadly.

In her (2003) preface to the original (1975) text of *Language and Woman's Place*, Robin Lakoff comments ‘we have come a long way (baby)’ (2003, (2004): 19), paraphrasing a 1970s advertising slogan to reference the progress made by – and for – women since the publication of *LWP* in terms of equality of opportunity and awareness of the language of gender stereotyping. However, as she also acknowledges

like the sentiments expressed in the commercial, the changes in gender stereotypes may look encouraging but, when inspected more closely, are often depressing (ibid).

Lakoff contended that ‘language uses us as much as we use language’ (2004: 39). My research seeks to understand, forty years after the publication of *LWP*, how a group of women uses language and how language uses them, and in doing so to apply the sociological premise which argues for ‘the importance of seeing the general in the particular’ (Lucal 1999: 786), i.e. not generalising the experiences of a particular group of individuals, but using them to examine critically the discourses structuring ageing and gender in the current cultural context. Moreover, as analysis undertaken here suggests, evaluations of female ageing, seemingly embedded in the day-to-day language of both private and public voices, continue to be freighted with ambivalence, anxiety, distaste and denial (see chapters 4-7). As long as the individual and cultural mirror (see 5.1.2 below) struggles to accommodate the reality of

the ageing female body, and as long as ageing women remain caught between external judgements of the “wrong” sort of visibility, or the imposition of invisibility, Lakoff’s statement that ‘we have come a long way (baby)’ remains open to serious challenge.

Chapter 2 establishes the wider cultural context for this study, discussing the principal ideas and approaches from a wide-ranging body of scholarship. Chapter 3 sets out the analytical methods and frameworks applied to the data analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on analysis of the qualitative interview data, with chapter 4 exploring the discourses of ageing, and chapter 5 examining the discourses of the ageing appearance. Chapter 6 builds on the analysis of these private voices and examines attitudes to ageing as expressed in a range of skincare advertisements, whilst chapter 7 focuses on representations of ageing women in different media discourses. Lastly chapter 8 discusses conclusions and implications arising from the analysis undertaken here and considers opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTS OF STUDY

‘Beyond 40 there is silence’ (Twigg 2010: 485)

2.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 established the broad nature and scope of this thesis; this chapter locates the work undertaken and the research questions I seek to address within the cultural and academic contexts which have shaped it. In terms of the domain of academic enquiry within which this study is situated, an investigation of gender and age is, by its very nature, a multi-disciplinary undertaking; moreover, as observed in chapter 1, the reciprocal nature of the relationship between gender and age(ing) is complex, and with regard to language used by and about ageing women, is a largely under-explored and under-theorised area; Twigg’s comment refers to this lacuna. The task of identifying a background literature for this thesis has therefore proved to be a challenging one. In the course of establishing a relevant and meaningful context of study it has not only been necessary to draw on a diverse range of writing, but to include older texts which, despite their vintage, still remain of central importance and have not been superseded by more recent scholarship. This process has highlighted a genuine gap both in terms of academic enquiry and a coherent, up-to-date body of literature. Although a substantial body of work on language and ageing exists in the field of clinical linguistics (e.g. linguistic disruptions resulting from age-related conditions such as dementia), this is not relevant to my research. In the broader fields of gender and language/linguistics there is, however, an absence in the literature of work which looks specifically at older women (as opposed to women in general), and most significantly, of studies which address (older) age as well as gender. There is research on language of/about specific age groups, such as Talbot’s (1995) and McRobbie’s (2008) work on teenagers and young women, which is outside my area of focus, and Eckert’s (1997) work on how age intersects with individual language practice through the lifecourse, which does not factor in gender. Work on gendered discourse in specific contexts such as business/professional environments e.g. Judith Baxter’s (2011) investigation into the language used by female business leaders does not include age as a variable. Papers in the *Journal of Women and Aging*, one of very few journals focusing on women’s ageing, offer some perspectives on language but in the context of social/ psychological/medical/attitudinal aspects of ageing,

rather than being specifically linguistic in orientation - although DeRenzo and Malley's (1992) paper on ageist language in skincare advertising is a rare exception. Whilst there are other exceptions in the literature such as Bróna Murphy's (2010) study on female talk, although its focus is more on young women, and Coupland et al's (1991) study on the linguistic construction of elderliness in inter-generational talk, although it does not specifically explore the intersection of ageing and gender, the most notable exception is Justine Coupland's considerable body of work analysing the language of and about ageing/older women, particularly in the context of anti-ageing skincare advertising and other advertising communication (see chapter 6 below), and most recently her (2013) exploration of discursive constructions of the ageing female body in the context of dance, all of which I have drawn on extensively in my analysis.

Thus in establishing a foundational body of literature which will specifically address the linguistic implications of the interrelationship of gender and age identities, this study draws on a wide range of areas of scholarship, bringing together relevant ideas and theoretical perspectives from such diverse domains as sociolinguistics, cultural theory, gender studies, social gerontology, identity theory, sociology, media studies and feminist discourse analysis. As the discussion in chapter 1 makes clear, the notion of 'discourse(s)' is central to the principal endeavour of this thesis to delineate the relationship between language as a personal resource in the construction of gender and age identity, and language as socio-cultural practice (see van Leeuwen 2005). At its heart is the critical examination of the complex interaction between the private voices which express people's everyday experience and the public discourses which constitute the cultural landscape. There is much commentary in the field regarding the polyvalence of the term 'discourse'. Wodak and Meyer (2009) note that the variety of approaches taken to discourse analysis in the field brings numerous ways of defining it, and Litosseliti (2013) also argues that discourse is a broad term which resists easy definition, 'often left undefined, vague or confusing' (2013:47). It is therefore essential at this point to provide a working definition of discourse/s as it is used in the course of this study.

As I will make clear throughout the analysis, I draw an important distinction between two levels or orders of language - the macro and the micro – in a way which allows their interconnectedness to be examined. As Fairclough states:

... ‘micro’ actions or events including verbal interaction, can in no sense be regarded as of merely ‘local’ significance to the situations in which they occur, for any and every action contributes to the reproduction of ‘macro’ structures (2010: 38)

Thus in terms of this study, the ‘macro structures’ are the discourse/s such as are generated by institutions, corporations, governmental bodies etc as well as the advertising and media industries: these last are the particular analytical focus of this study (see chapters 6 and 7). Discourse in this sense signifies the written and spoken language which encodes the ideas, language and assumptions that constitute prevailing culture, and which is inherently ideological, in that it does not simply represent the world, but as Litosseliti (2013) argues, ‘put[s] forward certain viewpoints and values at the expense of others’ (2013: 49) and in doing so constructs a reality according to a particular set of interests. One example from the analysis undertaken in this study is the discourse of age-as-illness (see 2.3.3 below), often employed in advertising communication, through which the process of ageing is pathologised and constructed as a group of “symptoms” which can potentially be “cured” (i.e. by investment in anti-ageing products). Connected to discourse in this sense but distinct from it, the ‘micro actions or events’ (see above) in the context of this study signify language use at an individual level: the linguistic strategies, resources and patterns of language use which constitute individual talk (see chapters 4 and 5 of this study),³ and through which cultural discourses are reconstituted, navigated, challenged.

Drawing on the extensive commentary in this field (e.g. Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Wodak and Meyer 2009, Fairclough 2010, Litosseliti 2013), discourse is understood as

‘a form of social practice.... socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people’ (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258).

Discourse can thus be seen as constituting social realities, relationships and identities, and as a mechanism of power which can create and perpetuate inequalities which are observable, for example, in the (often negative) evaluations applied to ageing women in some media

³ Occasionally in the course of the in-depth linguistic analysis of participants’ talk in chapters 4 and 5 I use the term discourse in its most basic sense to signify a stretch of connected sentences or utterances, but this is clear from the context, so there is no risk of confusion. It should also be noted that discourse in an interactional sense, i.e. as a resource used to achieve particular interpersonal goals in specific social contexts such as conversation, is not the main focus of this study. Nevertheless, the extensive body of work on gendered models of language in interaction (i.e. Lakoff 1975; Holmes 1995, 1998, 2001; Brown and Levinson 1978; Cameron 2001; Coates 1998; Trudgill 1972, 1998; Tannen 1994, 2001; O’Barr and Atkins 1980) provides important background context to the principal areas of exploration in this thesis.

commentary; this is exemplified in the quotation about Hillary Clinton which introduces chapter 1 in which she is negatively positioned by the discourse of the unwatchability of female ageing. Litosseliti argues that ‘discourses are manifested in texts and work to maintain, reconstitute and contest ... identities and social practices’ (2013: 3), so if, as argued in 2.2.2 below, the performance of gender and also age is socially and culturally constructed, then individuals’ sense of gender and age identity is a product of the discourses they absorb and inhabit. This can be observed in the comment from a mid-life female participant already cited in chapter 1:

.... I feel they’re [sc. colleagues] all so much younger and I’m kind of irrelevant but I do find outside that I notice quite a lot of attractive older men with white hair and I think there didn’t used to be all these men with white hair... but I can see that you just didn’t even see those people.... you become quite invisible [female participant, aged 56]

which shows that she has absorbed another prevalent discourse of ageing – that ageing brings personal invisibility. It would be over-simplistic as well as inaccurate to talk about a single homogeneous discourse; in terms of the particular focus of this study, the discourse of age-as-invisibility takes its place amongst many other discourses of ageing (see chapter 5), as well as relating to a multiplicity of other discourses concerned with women, men, appearance, health etc. Therefore, as Litosseliti notes, it is ‘more appropriate to talk about multiple *discourses*’ (2013: 48), and to see each discourse as a conjunction of agendas, assumptions, beliefs and evaluations. It is within these complex and fluid conditions that people go about the daily business of constructing self-identity. Drawing on a post-structuralist perspective (cf. Sunderland and Litosseliti 2008, Baxter 2008), the view taken here is that the multiple selves - gendered, ageing, sexual etc - which make up individual identity (see 2.3.1 below) are, as Litosseliti states, constructed and produced ‘through the choices we make from different discourses available’ (2013: 61); this speaks to the discussion in 2.2.2 below of gender and age identities as an accomplishment produced through language as a socially situated activity. Nor are such choices freely made, but are influenced/determined by the imperatives of cultural regulation and judgement (see 2.2.2 below). This point of intersection between public discourses and private voices is the often problematic conjunction where different power agendas meet, where individual desires come up against the cultural expectations which, according to Foucault, become naturalised into ‘discursive fact[s]’ (1976, 1998: 11), translated into discourses and absorbed into the language of everyday individual talk (see chapters 4 and 5).

The following sections therefore review the principal ideas which have informed the analytical focus of this study: section 2.1 looks at the broad cultural context; section 2.2 explores the principal theorisations of gender, and section 2.3 considers the nature of identity and the complex role of the body as a focus for cultural attitudes towards ageing and appearance. Section 2.4 summarises the key themes emerging from these contexts of study.

2.1 Cultural context

Lakoff 's argument that 'language uses us as much as we use language' (1975, (2004): 39, see also chapter 1) expresses this complex and reflexive relationship between micro and macro discourse domains (see Fairclough 2010). She contended that the language used by individuals in the constitution of gendered and age identities both produces, and is produced by, the cultural environment; therefore the linguistic analysis on which this thesis is based needs first to be understood in terms of the fluid and shifting conditions as discussed by Giddens (1991) which characterise postmodern culture, and which have given rise to prevailing cultural attitudes towards age(ing) and gender. There is considerable commentary from within the domain of cultural studies as well as the wider humanities concerning the importance of age as a component of identity; for example Twigg, writing about clothing as an index of cultural attitudes towards age, contends that 'age is one of the master identities, a key dimension of difference' (2013: 2), as well as commenting on its relative neglect as an area of academic and sociological enquiry, as Kathleen Woodward also observes:

we have invented courses in colleges and universities that study gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity and class. But not age. (1999: x)

In arguing for the importance of what Woodward terms 'age studies' (1999: x), both Woodward and Twigg draw parallels with the level of academic engagement with gender which has meant that forty years after the rise of second wave feminism, as Twigg states, 'we have come to recognise the centrality of gender to all aspects of the social world' (2013: 2). In addition, the dominance of theorisations of ageing as a medical phenomenon over social/cultural understandings of ageing (see chapter 1 above) has had significant effects at the most fundamental level of language, in the vocabulary used to describe and evaluate ageing both at the level of cultural discourse and individual narrative (see chapter 4 of this study). As Gullette comments:

The system that maintains the decline meanings of midlife ageing depends on an enormous range of subtle and blatant coercive discourses: we inhale this atmosphere every day [.....] thinking it's normal air. (1997: 5)

However, even if in the present cultural environment, perceptions of age and ageing may be starting to shift,⁴ the intersection between age and gender as identity categories remains largely unexplored, ideologically, socially and linguistically – a major point made from a cultural studies perspective in the collection of papers edited by Dolan and Tincknell (2012). Stephen Katz, commenting that ‘the link between age and gender is a crucial one’ (1999: 112) also notes the reluctance of women’s studies and ageing studies to connect at a theoretical level, an observation which still has currency 16 years on. Writing more recently, Twigg too acknowledges the importance of a critical examination of the relationship between gender and age:

A similar shift in understanding needs to occur in relation to age. It too is one of the key structuring principles of society [....] It intersects with other social categorisations in significant ways, so that the ways in which ageing is experienced and understood are closely affected by cross-cutting identities, particularly gender and social class. (2013: 3)

As such commentary suggests, the intersection of age and gender is inherently problematic territory, freighted with a cultural unease which appears rooted in the difficulty of accommodating the older female body both discursively and visually, both as an object of the external gaze and as the subjectively experienced vehicle of self-identity. Many commentators argue (see Sontag 1972 (1978), Woodward 1991, 1999, Twigg 2013, Dolan and Tincknell 2012, Gullette 1997, Furman 1997) that cultural ambivalence towards age(ing) finds a focus in the ageing female body, and is expressed through conflicted and conflicting discourses, often via the media as the lens of cultural attitudes, which render the ageing female body, paradoxically ‘both invisible and hypervisible’ (Woodward 1999: xvi). Rosalind Gill, in her work in the field of feminist media studies, offers an overview of contemporary representations of gender in which she comments on ‘the extraordinary contradictoriness of constructions of gender in today’s media’ (2007: 1), in which for example, discourses of ‘girl power’ sit alongside a pervasive re-sexualisation of the female body, but where the continued invisibility of older women in public contexts persists. Gill

⁴ Examples of gradual shifts in attitudes to women’s ageing can be observed in the domain of skincare advertising, in the work of the Dove brand’s Campaign For Real Beauty (see chapter 6), and in the launch of the Charter Against Ageism and Sexism in the Media (July 2013) as part of the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) programme, an initiative orchestrated by the University of Sheffield.

argues that ‘feminist ideas have become a kind of common sense, yet feminism has never been more bitterly repudiated’ (ibid), suggesting that along with the media, gender relations and feminism itself is in a state of flux. She argues that this complex cultural environment, which can be regarded as a ‘postfeminist era’, poses particular challenges for the construction of gender and age identities. According to her analysis, postfeminist media culture is characterised by a number of recurring themes:

the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; ...the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; a marked sexualisation of culture (2007: 255)

These themes coexist – perhaps perpetuate – historical exclusions related to race, age, ethnicity, sexuality etc, and Gill’s analysis provides a useful theoretical context for analysis of participants’ personal and often problematic experiences of ageing as gendered subjects, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of this study. The reluctance to engage with gender and ageing as interlinked, interdependent identity categories (see above) can be further understood by examining other powerful intersections which shape the cultural landscape, in particular three dominant forces in postmodern, postfeminist culture: first, the cultural appropriation of ageing and the institutionalisation of the lifecourse; second, the structuring of contemporary culture around a series of ideological binaries; and third, the impact of consumerism and the mass-media on the construction of gender and age identity.

2.1.1 Ageing and the institutionalisation of the lifecourse

Study of the lifecourse has become a significant object for academic enquiry, generating an interdisciplinary body of scholarship and theoretical approaches. The term itself is sociological in origin, and as Amanda Grenier states, is ‘used to refer to an overall trajectory across the entire period of one’s life’ (2012: 8); according to Featherstone and Hepworth, ‘lifecourse’ describes the psychological and chronological progression through ‘an ordered sequence of stages through which all individuals allegedly move during the course of their lives’ (1988: 371). Grenier uses the notion of transition, a key concept in theorisations of the lifecourse, to structure her re-examination of current perceptions and attitudes towards ageing and old age. She explains transition in terms of the movement between the events and experiences which make up an individual’s lifecourse, her premise being that the transitions which mark progression through the lifecourse (childhood, middle age, old age; marriage,

retirement etc) have become increasingly institutionalised in contemporary society, mediated through what she refers to as the ‘standard models of change’ generated by institutions and organisations which form the infrastructure of society. Featherstone and Hepworth argue that growth in power of the state and the industrialisation of society have given rise to the idea of the lifecourse as something which should be controlled and somehow standardised, so that what is created is

a much more extensive institutionalisation of the life course socially structured into orderly sequences of psycho-social ‘growth’ and development (1988: 372)

They further argue that previously private spheres of life are now increasingly absorbed within the public domain; thus individual experiences of ageing, mediated through culturally constructed stages and transitions, intersect with cultural discourses, with discernible impacts on the way ageing is discursively constructed and evaluated in individual discourses (see chapter 4 below). As a result, the transitions which shape personal experiences of ageing and, crucially, the language practices which describe them, have become appropriated by culture’s normative discourses of ageing, creating, as Grenier argues, a tension between accepted models of ageing and lived experience:

In several domains, accounts from older people highlight how lived experience can vary from, or clash with, dominant understandings of ageing and late life (2012: 11).

This contention, borne out by the interview data collected for my study, shows that such tensions can be directly tracked in the language people use to construct their personal experience of ageing. Pirjo Nikander’s analysis of the language used by participants in qualitative interviews to position themselves with regard to membership of ‘stage of life categories’ (2012: 408) provides further evidence of tensions between institutional and individual interpretations of the lifecourse.

One manifestation of the problematic intersection between private and public ownership of the lifecourse can be seen in the prominence and significance of chronological age in cultural discourses of ageing. Featherstone and Hepworth take a historical perspective, arguing that in the course of the process of modernisation of Western societies

a life form in which chronological age was much less relevant was replaced by an increasingly age-relevant one (1988: 372)⁵

⁵ Tamara Hareven’s (1995) paper on the social construction of the lifecourse also provides a useful perspective.

Thus whereas previously the centrality of the family provided a broad structure for the lifecourse in terms of rites of passage such as the achievement of independent adulthood, marriage, parenthood etc, modern society views the lifecourse in terms of rigidly constructed stages (i.e. childhood, young adulthood, middle age, old age) which are delineated and defined by chronological age. Grenier documents the dominance of a socio-cultural model of ageing based on ‘age-and stage-based criteria’ (2012: 7), socially constructed chronological transition markers which are, as Grenier notes ‘firmly embedded in socio-cultural and organisational practices of policy, programming and service’ (ibid: 7). Furthermore, as analysis of public discourses in this study demonstrates, the language of age-and-stage based thinking has been widely appropriated by the media and advertising industries (see chapters 6 and 7) to become one of the cultural ‘master narratives’ (Gullette 1997: 9), intersecting with deeply embedded cultural discourses of age-as-decline (see section 2.3 below) and shaping the way people use language to construct their personal experience of ageing. As Gullette goes on to argue:

Decadism makes visible and collective what might be evanescent moments of panic. One of these public birthdays may even trigger the requisite feelings. “Fear of fifty” is being standardized. (1997: 4)

Justine Coupland too makes explicit the link between language and the socially constructed nature of age categories observing that:

[o]ften language gives pause for thought, if only because it confronts us with the great diversity of stances, experiences identities and evaluations that are projected in the name of age-categories, like being ‘middle-aged’ (2009: 852)

Institutionally and culturally driven views of the lifecourse which characterise it as a progression through a series of fixed chronologically-based transition points, each with ‘discrete points of entry and exit’ (Grenier 2012: 10), engender a further tension: between conceptualisations of the lifecourse as a process, made up of a progression of stages, and old age as a distinct and discrete period, separated from the rest of the lifecourse. Grenier observes that

this tension between age as a continuation of the lifecourse and a separate or different period of life is central to rethinking approaches to transition in late life (2012: 20)

A fundamental point arising from the work of Grenier and other commentators is that the distinction which has come to exist between ageing as a continuous process experienced through the lifecourse and old age as a state, defined by its separation from the lifecourse as a whole, is discursively constructed, mediated through the lens of cultural attitudes to ageing.

The relative neglect of old age as an area of general - rather than solely gerontological – enquiry may be one of the consequences of this discursive separation; however, it has a direct impact on the way in which old age is talked about and evaluated⁶ (see chapter 4 below). Grenier contends that the ‘taken-for-granted assumptions’ (2012: 13) underlying much thinking about old age fail to take into account diversity of individual experience of the ageing process. The tendency to homogenise old age elicits commentary from diverse domains: Coupland calls for an ‘awareness of heterogeneity’ (2009: 853) as a guiding principle in gerontological research; Haim Hazan (2000) considers the implications of imposing uniform and stereotypical visual characterisations of old age on older people; and Murphy (2010) uses corpus linguistic methods to argue that linguistic research into adulthood tends not to recognise age-related differences in linguistic behaviour, citing Eckert’s view that adulthood – including the cohort of the healthy (as opposed to cognitively impaired) elderly ‘has been treated more or less as a homogenous age mass’ (Eckert 1997: 65).

Cultural preoccupation with chronological age and the meanings attached to different ages drives language practice with regard to the lifecourse. The term ‘middle-age(d)’ is an example of this phenomenon, in which a chronological age category has come to embody a complex cluster of cultural judgements and expectations; thus as Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) argue, middle-age has traditionally been viewed as a relatively fixed period of maturity located between young adulthood and old age, but discursively more associated with ageing than youthfulness. However, their (1988) theorisation of a reconstructed middle-age offers a challenge to age-and-stage based thinking. They argue that the broader historical process of the ‘modernisation of ageing’ (1988: 385) presupposes the ‘loosening of chronological bonds’ (ibid) so that the ‘new middle age’ (ibid: 384) becomes an extended, fluid, period in the lifecourse, characterised by personal development, activity and growth, transcending the age-boundaries which have traditionally rigidly delineated young and older adulthood. It is significant that their characterisation of the redefined middle age, now more loosely described as ‘mid-life’ (1988: 385), in ideological, visual and linguistic terms ‘has more in common with youth than age’ (ibid: 383). This alignment with the values and imperatives of youthfulness, a significant theme in both the private voices and public

⁶ Nikander’s (2009) discursive analysis of age-in-interaction in the context of interview talk emphasises the significance of chronological age and lifespan categories in the linguistic construction of age identity

discourses in this study (see chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7), suggests that contemporary mid-life is powerfully shaped and defined by ‘a new vocabulary of motives’ (Featherstone and Hepworth 1988 (1991): 384), generating language practice focused around discourses of body maintenance and improvement (see Featherstone 1982; Featherstone and Hepworth 1988; Hepworth 2003; Coupland 2003). Grenier’s notion of ‘the unrelenting body’ (2012: 92), emblematic of the cultural emphasis on continued activity and productivity as the prerequisites of successful ageing into later life, can equally be seen as an aspiration and an obligation of the new middle age.

Thus mid-life in contemporary society is particularly complex terrain; the (sometimes conflicting) language practices which define it are uneasily situated between the discourses of youth and old(er) age, where those in mid-life are caught in a complicated transition between being no longer young but not yet old. This transitional territory may no longer be as rigidly defined by chronological boundaries, but nonetheless remains powerfully defined by a fundamental paradox which continues to inform cultural expectations of ageing – particularly as directed towards women - that the process of ageing presupposes maintaining the values and appearance of youthfulness. It could be argued that the new middle age is as subject to cultural appropriation in contemporary society as traditional conceptualisations of middle-age have historically been, despite Featherstone and Hepworth’s contention that

... the quest for a new public language to challenge and destabilise traditional cultural images of middle age for both women and men is a significant feature of the culture of mid-life as it has emerged in the West since the Second World War (1988: 383)

A further paradox is that a more fluidly defined mid-life sits alongside a perception of the lifecourse which continues to be defined by age-based thinking - generated by institutions and fuelled by the media - as reinforced by Coupland’s (2009) analysis of decadism in skincare advertising.

The next section builds on the discussion of age categorisation to explore a wider argument about cultural attitudes towards youth and age. Woodward states that:

.... in our culture, these distinctions [sc. age categories] ultimately and precipitously devolve into a single binary – into youth and age. Age is a subtle continuum but we organize this continuum into “polar opposites” (1991:6).

Although her comments were made almost 25 years ago, it can be argued that the youth-age polarity still pertains, that it is in fact one of the dominant forces governing contemporary

socio-cultural attitudes to ageing. It is embedded in the cultural evaluative infrastructure, driving the polarisation which characterises many cultural discourses of ageing and gender, generating a cultural binarism which in turn permeates through to the formulation of individual attitudes and judgements.

2.1.2 A culture of binaries

One of Sigmund Freud's preoccupations concerned his perception of the gulf of understanding (as he saw it) separating young from old. In a letter to a friend, he commented that

‘Young’ and ‘old’ now appear to me to be the greatest opposites of which human life is capable (letter from Sigmund Freud to Ernest Jones, May 3 1928, cited in Woodward 1991:6)

Woodward uses the Freudian idea of age-opposition in order to make broader observations on the impact of the cultural dichotomisation of youth and age. She considers the psychoanalytical concept of splitting⁷ as an analogy for the way in which contemporary culture forms its attitudes towards ageing and represents ageing discursively and visually. According to her argument, dominant culture's representations of ageing in which ‘youth, represented by the youthful body, is good; old age, represented by the aging body, is bad’ (1991: 7) can be interpreted, analogously, as a form of collective splitting which has its genesis in what she terms ‘our culture's denial and distaste for ageing which is understood in terms of decline, not in terms of growth and change’ (1999: xiii); this is visible at the level of language practice. Compare Rosamund Moon's (2014) study of English adjectival age-markers, which shows how the predictable positive polarity of young and negative polarity of middle-aged and old are reinforced through collocates that are often gendered and encode long established cultural attitudes and conventions.

The discursive positioning of youth and age, which places them at opposite ends of the evaluative spectrum structuring consumer culture, brings a powerful influence to bear on different domains of public discourse. The mass-media and beauty and cosmetic industries – the latter collectively characterised by feminist philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky as ‘the

⁷ As described by Woodward, splitting is a psychoanalytical concept observed in young children for whom it operates as a defense against ambivalence; ‘unable to tolerate feelings of ambivalence, the infant separates or splits what is most important into two representations – into the good and the bad. The infant phantasises.....two mothers instead of one – a good mother who is loved and a bad mother who is hated’ (1991: 7).

fashion-beauty complex' (1990: 39), in many ways exemplify and indeed perpetuate the discourse of evaluative binaries, in continuing to base their approaches to women on 'a cleaver sharp binary between beauty and the so-called ravages of time' (Woodward 1999: xvi). Woodward's contention, supported by other scholars in this field (e.g. Bordo 1993, Twigg 2013, Hepworth 2003, Gullette 1997) is that many such discourses focus on the female body as a powerful and ideologically freighted cultural text on which the 'cultural grip' (Bordo 1993: 17), already strong, is further intensified by these dichotomous discourses. Thus the young female body is made the vehicle for cultural ideals of femininity whilst the older female body is, by contrast, problematised or simply erased (see Woodward 1999 and section 2.1 above). Gill interrogates such naturalised binaries more deeply within the context of her analysis of postfeminist media culture – what she terms a 'postfeminist sensibility' (2007: 249), arguing that cultural/media obsession with the sexualised female body dictates that

the body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power *and* as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling...in order to conform to ever narrower judgements of female attractiveness (2007: 255)

However, as Gill points out, this highly sexualised media culture serves to highlight the exclusions made from its representational practice in which it is still generally young, slim and attractive women who are constructed as objects of sexual interest, whilst 'older, bigger women, women with wrinkles etc are never accorded sexual subjecthood' (ibid: 259)⁸. This observation also speaks to the discussion around ageing, femininity and sexuality in 2.2.6 (below).

The polarisation of youth and age encodes other cultural binaries; Grenier argues that public policy and practice in the area of health and wellbeing in late life, itself a product of ingrained age-and-stage-based thinking, creates - and perpetuates - binary distinctions between 'younger/healthy older people, and older/ill people considered to be in decline' (2012: 82) and as a result sustains commonly held socio-cultural perceptions of late life as a period of inevitable decline in contrast to preceding periods of the lifecourse which are

⁸ It could perhaps be argued that in the 9 years since Gill's book was published, media attitudes towards such categories of female 'otherness' are changing, although it is too soon to say whether this represents meaningful, sustainable change.

characterised by activity, health and the possibility of change and development. Thus what Grenier describes as the ‘binary polarisation of health and decline in late life’ (2012: 83) not only remains unchallenged but also supports the wider cultural narrative of youth and age as opposing states which encode opposing ideologies and evaluations. The menopause is another focus for cultural binarism (see also chapter 7 below); in her writing on mid-life and the menopause as cultural constructs, Gullette states

this lifecourse decline narrative requires as its pivot a critical moment, and event. The event crudely divides all women’s lives into two parts, the better Before and the worse After, with the menopause as the magic marker of decline (1997: 98)

In creating this division in the lifecourse, as Gullette suggests, the power of culturally constructed menopause discourse further embeds the discursive opposition of youth and age, by imposing an evaluative watershed on individual experiences of ageing, making the intersection with gender identity inherently problematic. The menopause heralds the end of reproductive capability and with it associated cultural notions of youthfulness, sexual activity and sexual desirability, and the start of a new phase of old(er) age, culturally defined by the absence of youthfulness and sexual activity (see section 2.2.3 below, also chapters 5 and 7). This has a direct impact on language practice, observable in the evaluations frequently applied by women to their appearance and sexual attractiveness. Ann Kaplan captures the polarised language which often typifies such personal evaluations and relates them to two other areas of significance for this study: the construction of identity and the performance of gender (see section 2.2 below):

As a woman’s appearance begins to lose its youthfulness, there may be a crisis of identity: I am either good, beautiful, whole and to be loved; or bad, ugly, fragmented, and unlovable, according to the degree to which my appearance fits into prevailing cultural discourses about “ideal” female beauty (1999: 174)

Thus the binarism which is one of the legacies of Helena Rubenstein’s now well-known ‘consumer equation of youth = beauty = health’ (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 179), structures society’s evaluation mechanisms to such an extent that it is normalised in the collective consciousness and embedded in the language, creating clusters of values around the ‘blunt binary of young and old’ (Woodward 1999: xvii) so that youth-beauty-health-sexual attractiveness and older age-ugliness-decline-deseexualisation appear as largely unquestioned ‘polar opposites’ (see above). Analysis of interview data undertaken in this study shows how these discourses inscribe the mirror in which women continuously monitor and evaluate their ageing appearance on a day-to-day basis. These private voices suggest that the linguistic

construction of this “mirror moment” (see chapter 5) reflects its literal as well as symbolic significance; it is at once where the real, lived experience of ageing and the work of identity construction takes place, and also the site of the often problematic intersection of the evaluations of the subjective gaze and the judgements of the cultural lens - moments commonly described in the language of negative evaluation and anxiety.

2.1.3 Discourses of consumerism

A review of the broader cultural context would be incomplete without considering a third major factor which has shaped the landscape within which ageing and gender must be viewed and understood: the dual forces of consumer culture and the mass-media which continue to be powerful forces in determining the attitudes and evaluations through which the opposing mirrors of youth and age are constructed. The rise of consumer culture and the development of consumer advertising as a form of mass-media communication have been extensively explored (see Featherstone 1982, Williamson 1978, Baudrillard 1970 (2010); Chaney 1996, Scanlon 2000). Featherstone argues that one of the paradoxes inherent in the way advertising functions within consumer culture is that it simultaneously liberates and enslaves its consumers, creating dissatisfaction by awakening desire:

images of youth, beauty, luxury and opulence became loosely associated with goods awakening long suppressed desires, as well as reminding the individual that he/she has room for self-improvement in all aspects of his/her life (1982: 172)

What has proved particularly significant for this thesis is the emergence of the body as the central focus of these discourses of consumerism and the vehicle for the visual representation of its messages, with resulting implications for the constitution of gender and age identity. Baudrillard describes the body as ‘the finest consumer object’ (1970, (2010): 129); however, it can be argued that such relentless objectification of the body is an expression of deeper cultural ambivalence. Gill questions the usefulness of notions such as ‘objectification’ within a postfeminist context (see 2.1 above) in which ‘far from being objectified, many women are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects’ (2007: 38). Nevertheless, the momentum of consumer culture which dictates that ‘the inner and outer body become conjoined’ (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 171) means that the (sexual) body, increasingly, becomes the vehicle and expression of individual self-identity, as discussed by the sociologist Chris Shilling (2003, see also section 2.3.3 below). As Shilling states:

their [sc. 'modern individuals'] sense of self [is] reflexively understood in terms of their own embodied biography (2003:4)

Discourses of 'body work' (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 178) which, according to Bartky, position the body (and the female body in particular) as inherently deficient, are the means by which culture appropriates the body, the relationship of the individual to their body, and by extension the way in which individuals construct their self-identity. Bartky opines that:

the fashion-beauty complex produces in woman an estrangement from her bodily being: on the one hand she *is* it and is scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, she must exist perpetually at a distance from her physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval (1990: 40)

Thus within the context of the 'managed narcissism' (Baudrillard 1970, (2010): 131) imposed on the body by the discourses of 'the fashion-beauty complex', the female body, and its role in the construction of gender and age identity, is the particular object of evaluation for the cultural gaze.

There is a considerable body of research on the role played by women's magazines in the construction of femininity (see Talbot 1995; Scanlon 2000; Douglas 2000; Jeffries 2007; Twigg 2010; also section 2.2 below). Talbot writes that

this discursively organised social space called femininity is articulated in commercial and mass-media discourses - especially in the magazine, clothing and cosmetics industries. Such discourses shape the social practices that form women's identities and relationships (1995: 144)

Similarly, Marjorie Ferguson argues that women's magazines have created a 'cult of femininity' (1983: 5), in which readers are positioned as adherents. It is generally accepted that the normative codes of femininity institutionalised in women's magazines and other areas of the mass-media are oriented around the values of youthfulness. It is also increasingly acknowledged that within the cultural ideal of femininity, and within its visual and linguistic vocabulary, there remains little place for the ageing female body. In her analysis of Vogue magazine Twigg states that:

Reflecting the values of the fashion world, it [sc. Vogue] has remained preoccupied with the youthful and transgressive; remarkably little work has been undertaken that addresses older people or the processes of ageing. Beyond 40 there is silence. (2010: 485)

Discursively, the 'virtually invisible subject of older women' (Woodward 1999: x) and the literal 'erasure of age' which Twigg (2010: 475) observes in the airbrushed representations of older women in the pages of Vogue are symptomatic of wider cultural ambivalence towards

ageing, in particular as it affects women. Sontag (1972) argued that cultural attitudes have made ageing more problematic for women than for men, with the result that, as Twigg's analysis suggests, older women are doubly marginalised. What is also revealed, however, is the lack of a credible, culturally accepted trajectory for ageing femininity, a phenomenon which may represent one of the greatest challenges to mainstream consumer culture. The impact of this can be observed in the analysis of interview data from mid-life participants in this study; the conflicted and often contradictory language they use in their private mirror moments indicates their struggle to reconcile the fundamental conflict inherent in the inevitability of physical ageing and the cultural orientation to youthfulness as a prerequisite of femininity (see chapter 5.1 below).

2.2 Gender and age: 'troublesome dichotomies'⁹

The problematisation of the relationship between gender and age has characterised debates within the field of language and gender studies since Simone de Beauvoir's now well-known comment that 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman' (1949, (1997): 295). Her words suggest a view of gender as a constructed entity, an act of volition, even an act of choice, which is separate from biological sex - a view also argued by the feminist scholar and theorist Judith Butler (1990, (2006)). This way of thinking about gender has contextualised key debates in this field concerning the (often problematic) relationship of gender to sex and sexuality; for example Butler argues that the relationship between gender and sex expresses a wider dichotomy which she articulates as 'biology-as-destiny and culture-as-destiny' (1990: 1), i.e. a view of gender as predetermined by biology versus gender as constructed by culture. Exploring these theoretical issues is key to a deeper understanding of 'the language used by and about women' (Lakoff 1990, (2004): 37) but more importantly in terms of the central focus of this thesis, to investigating the far less well-explored area of 'the language used by and about *ageing* women' (my italics).

2.2.1 Language and gender: 'women's language'

The reciprocal relationship between language and gender has been a focus for scholars, linguists and sociologists since the rise of second wave feminism, in large part inspired by

⁹ These words are taken from a section of the first chapter of Mary Talbot's work *Language and Gender* (2nd Ed) (2010)

Robin Lakoff's (1975) pioneering work *Language and Woman's Place (LWP)*, built on the central premise that meaningful linguistic exploration could exist 'beyond the level of the sentence' (1975, (2004): 18). In connecting language-in-use with wider cultural ideologies concerning the representation of women, Lakoff's work paved the way for much subsequent linguistic and sociological exploration of an area which it would be beyond the scope of this present study to examine in depth. However, a review of the principal ideas in this field demonstrates the theoretical perspectives which have structured approaches to language and gender since the publication of *LWP*, but which, as argued in this thesis, have not tended to accommodate age within the scope of their analyses.

Following Lakoff, it is generally accepted not only that language and gender structure each other, but that both are constituted through social practice (see Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Talbot 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987), and embedded in institutional frameworks as Erving Goffman (1959) argues; scholarship in this field has addressed different dimensions of this relationship. In terms of linguistic enquiry, Lakoff identified the notion of 'women's language' (1975, (2004), *passim*), a term she used as a short-code for her argument that women use language differently from men in ways which reflect and perpetuate the dominance of patriarchal constructions of gender. In the decades following the publication of *LWP* this has devolved into the analytical models of difference, dominance and deficit which have established the framework for sociological and linguistic debate (see Lucal 1999, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, Cameron and Kulick 2003, Talbot 2010). Rather than being viewed as separate, even dichotomous, approaches as some commentators argue (e.g. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003), these models can be considered to be connected ideologically and linguistically, in that they rest on a common assumption of asymmetrical power relations between men and women. This is reflected in some of the seminal studies in this field which suggest that particular language features both reflect and perpetuate embedded cultural structures of male dominance and female subordination: Lakoff's well-known analysis of the components of 'women's language'; Brown and Levinson's (1978) investigation of women's politeness strategies; West and Zimmerman's (1983) study of interruption in face-to-face conversation; studies analysing language use in specific social situations such as internet conversations (Herring, Johnson and DiBenedetto 1995) and domestic dinner-table narratives (Ochs and Taylor 1995); and Janet Holmes' (1984) work on hedging (although Holmes offers

a more nuanced perspective on the stereotype of tentativeness often associated with female speech patterns).

Gender socialisation theories (see Eckert 1989, Tannen 1994, Talbot 2010 and Eckert McConnell-Ginet 2003) view gender difference as being the product of the different language subcultures in which girls and boys are raised. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet argue that such 'gender work' (2003: 16) is the linguistic expression of ingrained ideological conditioning, an aspect of the 'gender order' (ibid: 33) which is jointly constructed between individuals and wider culture, and which dictates that 'everyone "does gender" without thinking about it' (Lorber 1994: 13). Litosseliti and Leadbeater's (2011) study suggests that gendered discourses produced by the taken-for-granted nature of the gender order continue to reinforce what they term 'occupational sex segregation' (2011: 91). Approaches which examine language in interaction such as Pamela Fishman's (1978) study of interactions between heterosexual couples, suggest that women assume greater responsibility for what she terms 'the interactional shitwork' (1978, (1983): 99), by doing the work of keeping the conversation going, facilitating and supporting male contributions without receiving the same treatment in return. However O'Barr and Atkins' (1980) study of the speaking styles and linguistic resources used by courtroom witnesses specifically challenges Lakoff's notion that women's language encodes powerlessness; they argue that some of the language features associated with women's language are in fact used by low-status witnesses of both genders. Their conclusion, that it is power rather than gender which is the dominant influence on language use, leads them to question whether what has come to be termed 'women's language' should more accurately be seen as the language of powerlessness and therefore for that reason, as not gendered. Cameron and Kulick's (2003) more nuanced exploration of this question suggests that in a male-dominated society there is a taken-for-granted correlation between 'power and masculinity/ powerlessness and femininity' (2003: 57), which means that within the confines of this dichotomous structure, similar language features may index both variables. However, a principal argument of this thesis is that in a cultural context which idealises youth and devalues age, there may be an equally significant correlation between powerlessness and *ageing* femininity whereby ageing becomes another index of powerlessness, rendered more so by the reciprocal negative impact of ageing and femininity. These questions remain to be explored, however, in that, as discussed above no real body of

work currently exists which focuses specifically on the impact of age and gender on language practice. If there is a lack of theoretical engagement with the language used *by* ageing women, there is a little more commentary on language used *about* ageing women. In the fields of literature and visual arts, the phenomenon of the invisible older women is well documented; Twigg's (2010) analysis of the absence of older women from the pages of Vogue magazine has already been discussed (see 2.1 above), and in her discussion of the role played by dress in the cultural polarity of youth and age, she comments that 'for older women, however, and to some degree older men too, the struggle is to be seen at all' (2013: 4). It is significant that the experience of the cohort of older female participants in this study (see chapters 4 and 5) bears out the reality of invisibility as a consequence of the ageing process, in which they see ageing, lack of visibility and personal powerlessness existing in a causal relationship.¹⁰

Forty years ago Sontag wrote that

there is a double standard about aging that denounces women with special severity (1972, (1978): 73)

If, as many scholars argue, femininity in the current cultural environment remains to some degree an index of powerlessness, then the effect of age/ing renders this a 'double marginality' (Woodward 1999: xi). In terms of language practice, the limitations of the difference, dominance and deficiency approaches have been increasingly recognised, and a more complex understanding of gender and the role of language in the construction of gender has been called for. However, there remains a need to accommodate age(ing) as a factor in the theorisation of gender, and to connect cultural discourses of ageing - what Gullette terms 'decline ideology' (1997: 9) - with gender ideology. As already stated, at the level of lived experience, the relationship between discourses of ageing and gender is currently relatively unacknowledged and under-explored and therefore would merit wider inclusion as an area of academic enquiry; given the current demographic profile of the UK population¹¹, this would

¹⁰ The 'Look At Me!' study, part of the New Dynamics of Ageing Project launched at the University of Sheffield in 2009, (cf. footnote 3) used group workshop situations to explore the impact of media representations of older women on participants' own experience of ageing.

¹¹ The Office for National Statistics (2014) states that one third of adults are currently aged 50 and above, and that there are now more people in the UK aged 60 and above than there are under 18 (source: *ibid*); furthermore women account for a higher proportion of older (65+) age groups than men due to a slightly higher life expectancy.

address a significant deficit in understanding.

2.2.2 Decoupling gender and sex

A recent and significant shift in gender theory is the move away from a conceptualisation of gender as a state of *being* which people are born with, to an understanding of gender as an act of *doing* (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, Talbot 2010), an ‘accomplishment’ (West and Zimmerman 1987:126) which individuals perform continuously in what Butler terms ‘a stylised repetition of acts’ (1990: 191). This notion of gender is enabled by another theoretical shift which decouples gender from sex, and by extension, sexuality. In this view, sex is interpreted as a function of biology, determined by ‘reproductive potential’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 10) and gender as a product of culture, discursively constructed. The conceptualisation of gender and sex as separate entities, set in train by de Beauvoir’s notion of ‘becoming’ (see above), challenges theorisations based on biological determinism, and has brought with it a more wide-ranging exploration of gender which questions the taken-for-granted nature of the ‘gender order’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 33). The most radical exemplification of this idea is Butler’s theorisation of gender as liberated from the seeming fixity and binary nature of sex to become ‘a free-floating artifice’ (1990: 9) in which

man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (ibid)

These conceptualisations of gender give rise to a more complex understanding of the role of language in the construction of gender identity. Paul Baker (2008) points out that Butler reverses traditional thinking on the relationship between language and identity which had seen language as a product of identity, arguing instead that identity is the product of language use. Thus if, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet argue, ‘language is continually constructed in practice’ (2003: 4), then gender and age, and other markers of identity which are constituted through language can be seen not as fixed and invariant entities but socially situated activities, constantly negotiated and re-negotiated within the fluid context of day-to-day interaction, as argued in West and Zimmerman’s (1987) classic analysis ‘Doing Gender’. In addition, Coupland et al’s (1991) studies of intergenerational talk suggest that ageing, like gender, is also to some degree a socially situated activity, discursively constructed in the moment. The achievement of gender in a given social situation is seen, according to Butler’s argument, as a consciously performed act, dependent for its success on the management and

organisation of a range of individual resources of which language is only one. As West and

Zimmerman argue, the performance of gender is not only a complex process, but one which

is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production (1987: 126).

It can also be argued that “doing ageing” as part of a performance of gendered identity is equally complex and even more subject to cultural judgements. Diane Railton and Paul Watson, in their (2012) analysis of the pop icon Madonna suggest that Butler’s notion of gender as the product of repeated performances enacted on the body, can equally be applied to ageing:

...age is similarly contingent – an effect performed across, or a particular stylisation of, the body (2012: 198)

The performance of gender, along with other categories of identity, inevitably takes place under the continuous gaze of prevailing culture, whose judgements as to the competence of the performance are driven by deeply embedded normative attitudes (see Butler 1990; Talbot 2010; Cameron and Kulick 2003). Alongside her radical theorisation of gender as freed from the constraint of the sexed body, Butler also concedes that gender performance itself must take place ‘within a highly rigid regulatory frame’ (1990: 15), that constraint is part of the fabric of cultural discourses which are

predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender (1990: 12)

The sociologist Harold Garfinkel’s (1967) case history of the intersexed person ‘Agnes’ offers a perspective on the ‘imaginable domain of gender’ as a co-constructed entity, showing how through the determined management of bodily and linguistic resources, Agnes seeks to achieve a performance of femininity which sustains the stringent nature of cultural regulation of gender performance and, in her determination to be recognised as ‘a natural, normal female’ (1967 (1984): 122) subscribes to, and reinforces, the prevailing gender binarism, and its requirements of normative femininity (i.e. young, heterosexual, sexually attractive; see section 2.2.3 below). The power of the culturally acceptable ‘domain of gender’ is such that individuals who deviate from it, as in the case of Agnes, must consciously use gender performance as a means of securing membership or face the penalty of exclusion, exemplifying West and Zimmerman’s (1987) argument that social acceptance and personal

legitimacy is contingent on competent gender performance. However, in recent years there has been a growing interest within academic as well as media domains, in gender performances which disturb normative codes of gender, i.e. as enacted by trans- and inter-sexed individuals. In the domain of academic enquiry, Butler's (1990) foundational analysis of drag, conceptualising it as a conscious mechanism of subversion – even inversion – of hetero-normative codes of gender performance, continues to inform a growing body of LBTG research within the field of gender studies. In the wider media domain, Channel 4's 2011 documentary *My Transsexual Summer* used the experiences of a group of transsexual people to bring to the wider public domain an exploration of the complex issues surrounding gender performance, sex and sexuality. The documentary contributed to a more nuanced understanding of gender by exploring the choices made by these individuals regarding (degrees of) membership of the culturally acceptable domain of gender, and the 'gender work' needed to achieve this. Most recently, the global publicity surrounding the transition of American reality television star Bruce Jenner into a transgender woman, Caitlin Jenner, accomplished under the full media and public gaze, has dramatically increased awareness - and perhaps acceptance - of issues relating to more complex gender performances,¹² although interestingly Jenner's status as an *ageing* transgender woman (she is 65) has not so far been the subject of media commentary. Nonetheless, a number of commentators argue that age troubles the domain of gender even more profoundly than such challenges to the gender binary. Woodward comments on the 'cultural distaste' (1999: xiii) surrounding the ageing female body; writing about fashion, Twigg argues that 'ageing has thus become a disruption in the visual field' (2010: 475), and Wearing considers the performance of femininity by an ageing body in terms of 'risk' (2007: 284). In order to understand more deeply the complex interrelationship of ageing and gender, the next section examines the notion of femininity as the visible enactment, or accomplishment of gender.

2.2.3 Femininity: conflicted territory

The concepts of femininity and masculinity and encode complex cultural meanings about what is "acceptable" gender display, and as such have become a focus for the cultural judgements which determine whether men and women conform to prevailing cultural gender

¹² Bruce/Caitlin Jenner's transformation was revealed by means of a full-body glamour shot on the front cover of *Vanity Fair* (June 2015).

ideologies. As stated in chapter 1, my thesis focuses primarily on women's experiences, therefore this part of the analysis is concerned with femininity, as 'the gender-ideal against which women's behaviour was judged by society at large' (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 47), and as a discursive construction produced by the current cultural environment.

Theorisations of femininity generally conceptualise it as an abstract notion, a discursive construct; Talbot (1995) suggests that the word 'femininity' represents not a single idea but a conjunction of different discourses, ideas and social practices. Dorothy Smith (1988) argues that the notion of femininity is at once an indeterminate and non-unitary phenomenon, whilst Susan Brownmiller views it as 'a slippery subject to grapple with' (1984: 19). However, despite the fluidity and abstraction surrounding it, the achievement and performance of femininity is a fundamental component in women's self-identity (see Talbot 1995, Bartky 1990), concretely enacted on the female body. Thus whilst Talbot argues that the discourses of femininity 'imping[e] on their [sc. women's] bodies' (1995: 144), it could be more forcefully argued that the female body is in fact their particular and singular focus. Bartky states that

to have a body felt to be "feminine" [.....] is in most cases crucial to a woman's sense of herself as female [....] To possess such a body may also be essential to her sense of herself as a sexually desiring and desirable subject (1990: 77)

Femininity is at once abstract and concrete, at once a discursive construct, a socially-constructed 'doing' (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126) and an embodied performance which, as Smith states, is 'what actual individuals are doing in the everyday settings of their lives' (1988: 38). However, the 'doing' of femininity must also be undertaken in the context of powerful and rigid cultural rules which determine the requirements for its successful performance, as Garfinkel's (1967) case study illustrates (see above, see also Bartky 1990, Smith 1988, Lucal 1999). Contemporary mass-media representations continue to use a visual vocabulary which conflates youth and beauty as the index of successful femininity (see also section 2.1 above). This in turn indicates a prevailing cultural ideology in which 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 2009: 19) is still, seemingly, required of women, who must construct their gendered identity under the scrutiny of 'the male gaze, the youthful gaze, the dominant-culture's gaze' (Furman 1997: 5) and, increasingly, of the female gaze, as explored in chapter 5 of this study.

Cultural binarism dictates that youth/beauty is the defining model of femininity, against which all performances of femininity are judged (see 2.1.2 above). An example referenced by Naomi Wolf shows the extent to which this cultural model is institutionalised in language practice: a standardised description favoured by US mail order catalogues selling clothes to professional women, is ‘businesslike yet feminine’ (1991: 42) in which ‘yet’ is the linguistic manifestation of a fundamental cultural dualism which sees the notion of ‘businesslike’ as an ideological and visual contradiction to highly regulated, appearance-based rules of normative femininity. Bartky argues that the embedded nature of this notion of femininity within the cultural infrastructure can be understood in terms of Foucault’s conceptualisation of power, in which the female body has become an instrument of the cultural forces of discipline and control, forces which in her view are ‘increasingly charged with the production of a properly embodied femininity’ (1990: 79), its dissemination through the mass-media and ultimate enactment on women’s ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault 1979: 138). The consequence, according to Bartky, is that normative femininity is even further regulated; the ideal female body as the focus of these discourses, is constructed through language and images as youthful, beautiful, sexually desiring and desirable, and presumed to be heterosexual. It is worth reiterating, as already stated, that even though many of these theorists were writing in the 1980s/90s, far from being rendered obsolete by more contemporary scholarship, their perspectives remain relevant to the current cultural context. It could even be argued that this is a reflection on how little has changed in terms of cultural attitudes towards femininity, and ageing femininity, as will be discussed in section 2.2.4 below.

It is widely accepted that the momentum of cultural discourse supports and sustains normative femininity; the powerful influence of mass-media and consumer discourses in the transmission of these cultural messages is also acknowledged in language and gender studies (see 2.2.5 below, see also Bucholtz and Hall 1995; Talbot 1995; Bartky 1990, Wearing 2007). However, the nature and extent of women’s choice to participate in the process remains a matter for debate: women are simultaneously viewed as being ‘trapped’ (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 179) by the prevalence of images of idealised female bodies which typify the visual repertoire of contemporary consumer culture, or, as Smith argues, are

seen as willing and active collaborators in the construction of their feminine identities:

we must not begin by conceiving of women as manipulated by mass media or subject passively to male power, but recognise when we speak of 'femininity' that we are talking about how women's skills and work enter actively into textually-mediated relations which they do not organise or produce (1988: 39)

The question of how far women are co-constructors of discourses of femininity remains key to understanding the construction of the feminine self, and is a further illustration of the duality inherent in cultural attitudes towards women's performances of gender. Compare Gill's discussion of the 'naturalised myth' (2007: 260) of female empowerment by which paradoxically, women are presented as autonomous agents who nonetheless "choose" to conform to a narrow interpretation of acceptable feminine appearance built around the attributes of youthfulness i.e. slim, firm, groomed body, wrinkle-free face. If, as Smith suggests, women are 'active and creative subjects' (1988: 39), choosing to undertake the 'beauty work' (Talbot 2010: 144) necessary for the accomplishment of cultural standards of femininity, they are, as Bartky argues, also choosing to subscribe to the 'feminine narcissism' (1990:37) which, whilst it is required of women by the external gaze, is also negatively evaluated by the same cultural voices which construe it as 'feminine vanity' (ibid). On the other hand, discourses which, as the feminist scholar Kathy Davis argues, position women as 'cultural dopes' (1995: 56) enslaved by the practices of femininity and the pressures of beauty norms, are viewed as equally problematic, particularly in feminist theorisations of gender which struggle to reconcile the binary nature of the external judgements - characterised by Bartky as 'the gaze of the Other' (1990: 27) - which position women either as accomplices in, or as the 'passive products' (Smith 1988: 39) of, the discourses of the 'fashion-beauty complex' (Bartky ibid: 40). As Davis comments:

it is difficult to explain why women who have managed to defy social conventions in other areas of their lives are unable to resist the norms of beauty (1995: 43).

Davis uses her analysis of cosmetic surgery to explore the paradox of what she terms 'the feminine beauty system' (1995: 56) which is constructed around the centrality of beauty to the cultural ideal of femininity. She argues that women's participation in the systemisation of feminine beauty, itself freighted with contradictions, is a complex and often conflicted process. Women are caught in a particular double-bind in which desire to conform to standards of feminine beauty and desire to resist its pressures are equally powerful. According to Davis this paradox is exemplified in women's - often ambivalent - relationships with cosmetic surgery and the greater possibilities for body control and transformation it

affords. This ambivalence is borne out in interview data analysed in this study, which shows that amongst female participants of all ages, but in particular the mid-life cohort (see chapters 4 and 5), the resistance-conformity dilemma exerts a profound influence over the daily reality of self-evaluation in front of the mirror, and is frequently fraught with genuine anxiety. The conflict inherent in these women's simultaneous desire for emancipation from the pressures of these powerful cultural expectations regarding the performance of femininity, and the concession (however unwilling) to their irresistible force, is directly visible in their language, expressed through linguistic features such as the frequently occurring use of 'should' (see chapter 5).

As discussed in section 2.1 above, shifting cultural attitudes to ageing and the reality of an increasingly ageing population, is forcing changes in attitude in some areas of public discourse; there are examples in recent media commentary of attempts to engage with the challenge age(ing) presents to the performance of gender, such as Channel 4's (2013) documentary *Fabulous Fashionistas*, which explored the lives and fashion choices of a group of women aged 73 - 90 (see further below)¹³. Nonetheless, as the next section discusses, accommodating the disruption ageing brings to the performance of femininity remains one of current culture's greatest challenges.

2.2.4 Ageing femininity

Bartky's contention that 'there is, of course, nothing new in women's preoccupation with youth and beauty' (1990: 80) can be applied to the problematisation of ageing and its impact on the (female) body. The rigidity of linguistic and visual codes which continue to define normative femininity in contemporary Western culture, have, if anything, intensified the conflict between cultural expectations of gender performance and attitudes to ageing (see Woodward 1999, 2006, Oberg 2003). Thus as argued in this thesis, age(ing) is one of the most feared – and least understood - disruptions to gender identity, and furthermore has a

¹³ A further example, an (2012) artistic project entitled 'Aunties' undertaken by an American painter Aleah Chapin, directly confronts the challenge of age to gender performance by producing a series of portraits of completely naked older women, shown laughing together, their ageing bodies un-idealised, depicted with almost photographic realism. Chapin describes her motivations as 'about exploring beauty and age' (source: *Sunday Times Style Magazine* 26th January 2014)

profound, and generally negative, effect on the way femininity and sexuality (in the sense of sexual attractiveness) are interpreted and judged in the current cultural context.

Much of the collective unease surrounding the intersection of ageing and femininity is focused on the visible impact of ageing on the female body, often expressed via ambivalent representations of older women in magazines and other mass-media discourses. Furthermore, the ageist ideologies on which these texts are based are often covert, encoded at a subliminal level through the selection and structuring of semiotic resources (this is demonstrated by the multimodal analysis of a range of magazine articles and anti-skincare advertisements undertaken in chapters 6 and 7 of this study). That evaluations of ageing and its visible signs are dealt with in this manner is perhaps another characteristic of the way in which ideology structures communicative approach in the current culture, by naturalising embedded ageist attitudes (see Fairclough 2010 and also chapter 1 of this study) and presenting them as unquestioned truths. Although the momentum of demographic change means that older women are now more visible in advertising and the media, this greater visibility is itself an ambivalent phenomenon. Wearing examines the discourses of television makeover shows in order to illustrate the duality of cultural attitudes to the performance of gender and ageing. She argues that:

A further complexity lies in the competing presence of two, apparently contradictory, discourses on aging in postfeminist culture. On the one hand, we find a vibrant, even utopian, celebratory insistence that age need not mean loss – of femininity, of fun, of “girlhood”, perhaps finally of “self”. At the same time, however, a more cautionary note is sounded, which suggests less that age “need not” and more that it “must not” be allowed to relax the hold of “youth” on the body...(2007: 286)

The cultural gaze which finds the spectacle of the ageing female body distasteful is also, as Wearing suggests, suspicious of efforts made to resist the visible signs of ageing. Thus for the cultural/economic forces driving the commercialisation of femininity, whose success is predicated on the consumer equation of youth=beauty, ageing represents ‘a disruption in the visual field’ (Twigg 2010: 475, see also Furman 1997, Gullette 1997). At the same time, a reconfigured, more fluidly defined mid-life (see 2.1 above) has opened up a consumption community of Third Age people (see Grenier 2012), the so-called ‘baby boomers’¹⁴ (see

¹⁴ This term is used to describe the generation born between 1945 and 1965 who, according to Gilleard and Higgs ‘helped shape the post-war ‘youth culture’ (2000: 9) and who are a powerful economic force behind the development of anti-ageing technologies.

Gilleard and Higgs 2000) whose expectations regarding lifestyle and consumption are more centred on youthfulness than age as Featherstone and Hepworth (1988) argue. This new group of consumers, as Twigg observes, ‘do not perceive themselves as old and see no reason why they should be treated as such’ (2010: 483), nor it could be argued, *represented* as such in mass-media discourses. Thus as noted above, one of the principal challenges for beauty and cosmetic corporations as well as media and advertising industries may well lie in the complex navigation between the (lucrative) needs of a growing cohort of mid-life consumers and the constraints of underlying, embedded cultural attitudes towards ageing which remain as Woodward states, ‘profoundly ambivalent, and primarily negative’ (1991: 8).

2.2.5 Femininity as a product of consumerism

One of the great cultural changes of the last 50 years is the extent and nature of the influence of mass-media discourses. The appropriation of the female body by the conglomeration of discourses generated by advertising, beauty/cosmetic branding and women’s magazines is a characteristic of current culture (see Williamson 1978, Bartky 1990, Talbot 1995). Not only has the mass-mediated female body become ‘the finest consumer object’ as Baudrillard states (1970, (2010): 129, see also 2.1.3 above) but the act of feminising the body, the accomplishment of femininity, is made contingent on the consumption of the products necessary for its achievement, what Woodward terms ‘the insignia of [the] gendered body’ (1991: 3). In this way, as Talbot argues, femininity itself has become ‘a mode of consumption’ (2010: 151). As already discussed, at a macro level femininity can be understood as a discursive construct produced by the vast machinery of commercial, advertising and mass-media discourses. Moreover, as conduits of cultural ideologies, these public voices have the power and communicative reach to shape the construction of gender identity at the most fundamental level of lived experience, determining how women evaluate and talk about their bodies and by extension their sense of feminine selfhood. Women’s magazines are particularly influential in this regard and there has been considerable exploration of their role and influence on female identity construction (e.g. Winship 1987, Ballaster et al 1991, Twigg 2010, Talbot 2010, Machin and van Leeuwen 2007, also section 2.1.3 above). Whilst it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine this body of work in detail, it is worth setting out the principal analytical themes.

Since its emergence as a genre in the mid-eighteenth century (see Ballaster et al 1991, Winship 1987), the women's magazine has been intimately interconnected with cultural notions of gender and gender display; indeed it could be argued that the discourse of the women's magazine has developed, as Ballaster et al state, in a 'dynamic process of exchange' (1991: 44) with shifting ideological stances towards gender. Women's magazines can therefore be viewed as ideological texts, powerful repositories for cultural ideals of femininity, existing in a reciprocal relationship with wider discourses, establishing an evaluative context for women's experiences in a range of different domains, and providing the linguistic frameworks within which those experiences are expressed and evaluated at an individual level. The small-scale review of selected contemporary women's magazines carried out for this study (see chapter 7) supports the wider body of generally critical research on women's magazines, which as Gill suggests 'points to them as a locus of ideological messages that serve to legitimise and naturalise unequal relations, and which offer a narrow and restrictive template of femininity' (2009: 347) expressed through the (still) relatively limited range of feminine identities which are offered to women. These take the form of age-related identity categories as Ballaster's (1988) study illustrates, (e.g. 'mother', 'homemaker', 'ambitious career woman') which mobilise diverse resources of femininity, although the foremost of these - appearance - remains the key index of postfeminist femininity.

Across the demographic span of the readership of women's magazines, starting with publications targeting adolescent girls (see McRobbie 2008), there are commonalities in the ideological approach taken towards the female body and the construction of femininity. The overarching rhetorical strategy (see Jeffries 2007) is that of 'body work' (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 178, see also Wearing 2007) through which the female body is presented as inherently 'deficient', 'an object in need of transformation' (Bartky 1990: 40), and demonstrably a lifelong work in progress. At the level of language, a conceptual metaphor (as defined by Lakoff and Johnson 1980) of femininity-as-work is often drawn on in order to present as an unquestioned truth the notion that the accomplishment of femininity is a task requiring continuous investment and surveillance. As Smith comments, 'the texts of the discourse of femininity index a work process performed by women' (1988: 44). Thus femininity is the product of an acquired skill or learned craft (Davis 1995), an economic investment in 'physical capital' (Bourdieu 1978: 830), a science (Coupland 2003) or an

achievement acquired through (necessary) suffering (Davis *ibid*). In this way the female body and the performance of femininity have become cultural commodities: the body is discursively positioned as ‘cultural plastic’ (Davis 1995: 17), and femininity as the expression of gendered identity which can, indeed must, be procured by acts of consumption. Women’s magazines position the consumer/reader through a range of often covert linguistic strategies (see Jeffries 2007) encoded in specific language features such as use of pronouns which assume inclusion in a shared belief system as Talbot (1995) notes, and lexical choices and verb forms designed to frame the culturally generated ideal of femininity as an obligation and a taken-for-granted, shared aspiration.

As already observed, a consequence of a model of normative femininity based on youth/beauty/sexual desirability is that there is no accepted linguistic or visual trajectory for accommodating age and ageing within the cultural rules governing the performance of gender. Indeed, in what Twigg terms ‘this new visual culture of perfectionism’ (2010: 475) the process of ageing and its effects on the body appear even more at variance with the cultural context than in previous decades. At a macro level, and within the domain of mass-media communication, there is deep-seated unease regarding the ‘cultural work the aging, gendered, body is expected to perform’ (Wearing 2007: 278). Furthermore, as discussed in 2.1 above, there has been a reluctance to engage with the ageing female body as an area of sociological enquiry, although feminist scholarship offers some challenge to the dominance of theorisations based around heteronormative conceptualisations of gender display; for example Davis states that

Those designated by the dominant culture as Other (old, homosexual, disabled, fat, and/or female) become imprisoned in their bodies (1995: 51).

However, it is interesting to note that even though designations of ‘Other’ may include age as Davis suggests, other categories of difference such as class (McRobbie 2008), ethnicity (Brewer 1993) and sexuality (Cameron and Kulick 2003) appear to be more readily constructed as objects of investigation. The seeming reluctance to include ageing in continuing debates on intersectionality, as Twigg (2010) notes, suggests that the potency of its impact on women’s sense of feminine selfhood and identity construction remains somewhat underestimated within academic as well as wider discourse domains. This cultural context means that for women in particular, the relationship between gender identity and the

process of ageing appears more conflicted and problematic than ever. Femininity, which is culturally required, must accommodate the ageing body, which is culturally denied, and at the heart of this seeming paradox and the collective unease it generates, is the notion of sexuality (used here in the sense of sexual interest/desire) and the dilemma of its role as a component in the performance of ageing femininity¹⁵.

2.2.6 Ageing, femininity and sexuality

It is sometimes said that women of a certain age constitute a ‘third sex’; and in truth, while they are not males, they are no longer females (de Beauvoir 1949 (1997): 63).

In describing women of a certain age as ‘a third sex’, de Beauvoir pinpoints what is perhaps the most profoundly problematic dimension of the way in which, in the current culture, age and gender structure each other in terms of the body, and highlights the contradictory and paradoxical nature of the intersection of these two markers of identity. Cultural discourses tend to characterise the process of ageing as one of loss (see Gullette 1997, see also 2.3 below). Amongst the general catalogue of physical losses, perhaps one of the least documented is the desexualising effect of the ageing process which, however, may not be synonymous with the process of ‘degendering’ which Catherine Silver discusses in her (2003) paper on (de)gendered identities in old age, in which she describes the post-menopausal female body as no longer ‘attract[ing] “the gaze” of men’ (2003: 386). Alice Freed, reflecting on the distinction between ‘degendering’ and ‘desexualising’ suggests that the latter term is more accurately employed to describe the taken-for-granted expectation that older women, whilst still presenting as female, are no longer evaluated or represented as objects of sexual interest (September 2014: personal communication). Similarly, Oberg writes that ‘older women are rarely portrayed as sexual, and sexual desire in older women is usually a point of ridicule’ (2003: 116), and as Frida Furman’s (1997) study of beauty parlour culture demonstrates, the way in which older women evaluate their bodies is in constant tension with representations of youthful, sexually desirable femininity, as Gill (2007, 2009) also argues (see 2.0 above). Indeed, as Faircloth contends, in Western culture where the male body is considered to be normative and the female body, by comparison, as “other” (2003: 6,

¹⁵ It is worth remarking that, as discussed in chapter 7, the role models of successfully ageing women presented by the media (i.e. Helen Mirren, Judi Dench, the Fabulous Fashionistas) are in various ways exceptional, out-of-the-ordinary women for whom age may constitute a lower ‘risk’ to their femininity.

see also de Beauvoir 1949, (1997)), the notion of an older female body which can still be sexual, may be doubly “othered”.

Elizabeth Markson, in her analysis of the ageing female body in film writes:

the postmenopausal body, having lost its reproductive (and by implication, sexual) charm, neither is the object of the appreciative male gaze nor does it fit into contemporary cultural discourses about “ideal” female beauty (2003: 80)¹⁶

A central theme of Gullette’s work is that menopause is a culturally constructed ‘discursive phenomenon’ (Gullette 1997: 98, see also Greer 1991) before it is a physical/biological one, which nonetheless desexualises women, so that as Silver argues, ageing women are perceived to be ‘useless sexual objects’ (2003: 387). Railton and Watson’s (2012) analysis of Madonna characterises her as a transgressive icon of ageing femininity, challenging cultural requirements of the performance of ageing femininity largely because she remains sexualised; this illustrates the rigid and yet contradictory nature of the cultural “rules” which are enshrined in the discourses of mass-media publications (see chapter 7 of this study). These influential discourses are powerful sites of identity production; it is here that the work of constructing what Railton and Watson refer to as the cultural ‘blueprint’ (2012: 199) for successful female ageing takes place, and where its messages are disseminated. The requirements of ageing femininity as laid down by these public voices are based primarily around the complex series of balances involved in the maintenance of an appropriate appearance. Older women must, seemingly, contrive to disguise the signs of ageing without appearing too young whilst maintaining an appropriately youthful appearance, and remain attractive without appearing overtly sexualised. The problematic status of the ageing female body, caught between cultural expectation and biological reality, suggests that for women, as Wearing notes, ‘the achievement of a stable and coherent gendered identity over time’ (2007: 286) is a highly complex and uncertain task. Woodward delivers something of an exhortation that ‘the feminist aging body, entailing gender and sexuality as the continuing site of identity, need not be a contradiction in terms’ (2006: 177). However, it could be argued that this contradiction will persist whilst the ideological, visual and linguistic repertoire of contemporary culture is unable to accommodate a notion of ageing which permits both sexual

¹⁶ The American comedian Amy Shumer highlights the negative correlation of sexuality and ageing in her Youtube sketch ‘the last fuckable day’ (22/4/2015) which shows a group of (attractive) actresses “celebrating” their liberation from being objects of sexual interest on film because they have crossed the threshold of 50.

desirability and femininity, and a notion of femininity which can meaningfully encompass the ageing female body. Wearing's analysis of 'the complex psychic processes that may accompany the production of gendered identities as we age' (2007: 285) suggests that for individuals as well as for prevailing culture, ageing is experienced and viewed as the foremost threat to this process.

2.3 Ageing and identity

In the old person that we must become, we refuse to recognise ourselves (de Beauvoir 1970:4)

De Beauvoir's statement encapsulates the nature of the challenge which ageing presents to identity construction, and the complexity of individual responses to a sense of changing identity in which the self and the ageing body come to be viewed as separate entities, distanced from each other by the inevitability of ageing, depersonalised ('*the old person* that we must become') and powerfully denied at the most fundamental level of subjective awareness ('we refuse to recognise *ourselves*'). Her words point up the tensions inherent in the notion of identity: it is at once an abstract, fluid and theoretical framework for articulating the nature of the inner self (see Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema 2008) and at the same time is experienced physically as an embodied and gendered phenomenon (see Giddens 1991, Shilling 2003, Nettleton and Watson 1998). The process of ageing destabilises identity construction at a theoretical level as well as at the level of embodied experience, and in order fully to understand the nature of this reciprocal impact, it is important to consider theorisations of ageing, gender and identity in a way which acknowledges their interdependence.

2.3.1 'Identity Trouble'¹⁷

A body of literature now exists on identity theory which unites perspectives from diverse domains of scholarship: e.g. discourse analysis, cultural theory, sociology and psychology. The theoretical consensus is that the concept of identity is inherently problematic, both at the level of language, as an expression of the (somewhat amorphous) notion of self (see Giddens 1991, Lemke 2008), and as the concrete and embodied manifestation of selfhood which must

¹⁷ This title is taken from the (2008) book *Identity Trouble* edited by Carmen Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Iedema

operate in the external environment. Carmen Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Iedema's (2008) book *Identity Trouble* characterises the work of self-definition and self-identification in the fluid and fragmented conditions of late modernity as a troubling and uncertain project; similarly Giddens writes that the dangers which threaten self-identity are a feature of "“living in the world”" (1991:188) of late modernity, these are the 'tribulations of the self' (ibid) which must be overcome in order to maintain a stable and coherent biography of self-identity. Indeed the fundamental nature of 'identity trouble', according to Jay Lemke, is precisely its 'boundary-riding role' (Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema 2008: 7), uneasily straddling the intersection of private and public, of theoretical and embodied domains.

Much of the scholarship in this field explores identity at a theoretical level. Lemke's conceptualisation of identity emphasises its non-unitary, multiplex nature; far from being a fixed entity, it is portrayed as constantly changing and developing. This view of identity sees it as not just multi-faceted but plural, so that each individual possesses an 'identity repertoire' (2008: 19) comprising different distributions of behaviour and traits which combine and recombine depending on the cultural and social contexts which determine the boundaries of identity performance. For Lemke a fundamental tension exists between identity as the expression of an individual's inner state and its appropriation by the cultural forces of modernism. Paraphrasing Foucault he argues that:

modernism has found more and more ways to take the inner soul, which was private, [...] and make it into a more public terrain of identity, under surveillance and subject to control by outside interests (2008: 32)

Not only is what was private now made 'public terrain', but the naturally fluid and multi-dimensional nature of identity is increasingly subject to pressure to conform to 'stereotypical pseudo-identities' (2008: 32) generated by advertising and consumer discourses, and as Machin and van Leeuwen (2008) argue, also by institutions. Giddens' conceptualisation of self-identity defines it as 'the reflexive project of the self' (1991:5), through which the coherent, continuous narrative of the self is sustained; he argues that cultural forces of high modernity 'intrude deeply into the heart of self-identity' (1991: 12), particularly through the increasing power of lifestyle identities (see Chaney 1996), which threaten the stability of this story of the self. These theorisations all highlight tensions between the culture of 'pret-a-porter, ready-to-wear' (Lemke 2008: 34) categorisation and the complexity of identity, which according to Lemke puts the different components of identity in conflict with each other:

...the frequently noted contradictions between our subjective identities, who we are to ourselves and our projected identities, who we wish to seem to be to others (2008: 20)

In Lemke's model of identity, the subjective identity is 'who we are to ourselves' (2008: 20) whilst the projected identity represents the self which is prepared for and presented to the 'gaze of the Other' (Bartky 1990: 27). There may be a third, and equally influential component, suggested by the interview data analysed in this study, which is the *received* identity (see chapters 4 and 5 below). This can be understood as the identity offered to/imposed on individuals by mass-media discourses, which plays a complex role alongside the other components of identity.

The review of identity theory discussed above, together with data analysed in this study, indicates that the process of ageing may have a more complex impact on self-identity and identity construction than perhaps has been acknowledged in the literature, where as already stated, identity markers such as gender, ethnicity and class have tended to be the focus of academic enquiry. Woodward describes the 'profound cultural ambivalence' to ageing (1991: 8) which dictates that there is little understanding - and only uncertainty - at a cultural as well as an individual level about the process of building what Gullette terms the 'age identity' (1997, *passim*). Gullette's use of the term 'age identity', which deliberately juxtaposes 'age' and 'identity' is intended, at a linguistic level, to subvert commonly held cultural perceptions which have struggled to accommodate the notion of age and the possibility of continuing identity construction. One consequence of this cultural lack of connection with age(ing) may be the separating out of (old) age within the lifecourse, as described in Grenier's (2012) analysis and discussed in chapter 2.1.1 above. Giddens, exploring the notion of lifespan within the settings of high modernity, writes of the cultural reflex towards 'the sequestration of experience' (1991:149), his terminology for the mechanism by which society conceals threats to its 'ontological security' (*ibid*: 156) such as madness, sickness and death, which have the potential to endanger the stability of individual self-identity. Although not explicitly referenced, it can be argued that ageing too is one such threat.

Lemke also explores the notion of the production of identity through the lifecourse, making a distinction between the idea of 'identity-in-the-moment' and 'identity-across-the lifespan'

(2008: 23). He uses Butler's (1990) theory of identity performance and temporality to theorise how the short - and long-term relate to each other in the constitution of identity, concluding that it is recurrence which links identity-in-the-moment to longer-term identity, much as Butler argues in the context of gender identity, which, as discussed above, she expresses as 'the stylised repetition of acts through time' (1990, (2006): 191). Whilst Butler's theorisation is concerned with the performance of gender identity, as Wearing points out

the centrality of the temporal, the necessity for constant repetition, and the possibility that repetition will "fail" are highly suggestive for considering the relationship between age and gender (2007: 285)

Looking at the relationship between age and gender in this way gives insight into how these two significant markers of identity might structure each other both in the moment and across the lifespan. As already discussed, Butler locates her conceptualisation of gender performance within a structured framework of cultural regulation (1990, (2006)), subject to the stringent judgement of its regulatory forces which, according to her argument 'police the social appearance of gender' (ibid). It could be argued that these same mechanisms of regulation mean that the impact of the ageing process renders the performance of gender unstable. Ageing disturbs the iteration of the normative codes of gender, particularly in terms of appearance, in that as Wearing suggests, there is a moment when the older female body 'is diagnosed as problematic' (2007: 286) by the evaluative gaze of the mass-media and consumer culture, and deemed an inadequate vehicle for the performance of gender. Moreover, as stated above, the uneasy co-dependence of age and gender means that prevailing cultural attitudes struggle to accommodate the notion of an age identity which meaningfully incorporates the performance of gender. The result – and the risk – is the 'spoiled identity'¹⁸ of the older woman. Thus whilst gender and ageing can be understood as fundamentally interrelated processes in the construction of identity, as this discussion suggests, the nature of this relationship, which is integral to achieving and maintaining a stable identity over time, is complex and often problematic.

¹⁸ This term is taken from Erving Goffman's (1963) work *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. It is used in this context to describe the threat which age(ing) is perceived to present to the acceptable performance of gender.

2.3.2 Identity as embodied

A shift in analytical focus has taken place over recent decades in the field of identity theory, driven by a general acknowledgement that the 'heavy theoretical burden' (Lemke 2008: 17) imposed on the concept of identity has, nonetheless, historically failed to accommodate and account for what is arguably the most immediate expression of identity and focus of 'identity trouble' – the body. Chris Shilling's notion of the 'absent-present body' (2003: 179) is indicative of a tendency in this field to make the body the subject of discussion rather than the object of analysis. According to his argument, it is as a result of the 'theoreticism' (Nettleton and Watson 1998: 2) of the 1990s, and in particular the theoretical approach of Judith Butler, that the body had lost its status as a physical entity, and as a consequence 'the fleshy physicality of our embodied being' (2003: 181, see also Bordo 1993). In advocating the need to 'bring the body back in' (ibid: 176) to sociological, philosophical and cultural sciences discourses of the body, Shilling's perspective forms part of a growing domain of body theory which acknowledges the centrality of the body to identity but also to everyday lived experience (see Giddens 1991, Nettleton and Watson 1998, Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema 2008, Woodward 1999, 2006). Thus the thrust of contemporary scholarship is to view 'identity as an embodied and socially situated phenomenon' (Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema 2008: 6), but not only that; theorisations of embodiment invest the body with an active role. Giddens argues that

in conditions of high modernity, the body is actually far less 'docile' than ever before in relation to the self, since the two become intimately coordinated within the reflexive project of self identity (1991: 218)

Similarly, Shilling's notion of 'the body as a project' (2003: 5) suggests a reflexive relationship between self-identity and the body in which the individual sense of self is understood and expressed through the body, via regimes of body control; it is through the exploration of this complex interaction between the inner self and the body as its vehicle, that the mechanisms of identity can be fully understood. Within the expanding field of embodiment theory there is also a call for a greater emphasis on empirical insights as a necessary counterbalance to the priority given to theoretical insights. Nettleton and Watson comment that 'the sociology of the body has, by and large, ignored the voices that emanate from bodies themselves' (1998: 2), and Lemke states that

the insistence that identities are embodied, and that embodied experience is fundamental to our sense of self, has led us to want more phenomenologically authentic accounts of identity (2008: 29)

Through examining the real voices of women in this study as they evaluate their ageing bodies against the background of the discourses of gender and age(ing) which converge around them, this study seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the domain of phenomenological authenticity.

In his interrogation of the concept of identity, Lemke questions ‘the role of the body [...] in shaping identity’ (2008: 17). Exploring this critical question reveals a fundamental contradiction which appears to underlie theoretical approaches to the body, as well as to embodied experience (see chapters 4 and 5 below). Theorisations which position the body as the instrument of agentive projects of self-identity (see Giddens 1991 and Shilling 2003) also recognise that bodily control, expressed through the discourses of body maintenance and improvement, is a symptom of ‘culture’s grip on the body’ (Bordo 1993: 17), rather than an expression of individual agency. Shilling writes that ‘the body has become a project to be moulded in line with people’s self-identities’ (2003: 5); however in the appearance-driven consumer environment of current culture, the body has become the ‘malleable entity which can be shaped and honed’ (ibid) in order to express not only the individual but also the cultural ‘project of the self’. As Giddens comments:

Appearance, to put the matter bluntly, [...] becomes a central element of the reflexive project of the self’ (1991: 100)

Cosmetic surgery has become an increasingly sophisticated tool in the ‘project of the self’, no longer merely as an instrument of repair, but as medical technologies advance with increasing rapidity, the seemingly endless possibilities it offers reinforce the status of the body, and the ageing body in particular, as a commodity which can (and must) be continuously ‘restyled, reshaped and rebuilt’ (Davis 1995: 17). Thus the role the body performs in identity construction is complex, symbolically, materially/physically and socially; the theoretical burden Lemke (2008) ascribes to the concept of identity finds an equivalence in Susan Bordo’s conceptualisation of the ‘unbearable weight’ (1993: title page) imposed by Western culture on the body as an expression of identity.

Justine Coupland and Richard Gwyn suggest that in the context of the consumer-driven culture of the twenty-first century, ‘the body has new work to do’ (2003: 4). As they argue, there are new and more complex demands placed on the body as it mediates ‘between self-

identity and social identity' (2003: 2), both the property of individuals and the object of cultural appropriation, constituted through the lens of cultural expectation. These perspectives suggest that Featherstone's notion of 'the inner and the outer body' (1982: 171) can be understood physically as the relationship of inner health and outward appearance, but also symbolically in terms of the (sometimes conflicting) needs of the subjective identity and the projected or received identity (see above). It could be argued that one of the tensions inherent in identity as an embodied phenomenon lies in the culturally driven fusion of inner and outer, of private and public, which means that the body has, in effect, *become* the identity. Indeed Shilling argues that faced with the uncertain environment of high modernity, and the search for stability and meaning as traditional religious frameworks and kinship networks decline, it is the body which appears to provide a firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of self in the modern world (2003: 2). Claire Carter, writing about the impact of anti-ageing and health discourses on women's gendered identity notes that the rise of consumerism has 'amplified the body's significance to a point where it is increasingly seen as a 'central paradigm for the self' (2014: 3). Her research highlights the extent to which the culturally acceptable model of femininity is associated with a 'youthful, healthy and fit looking body' (2014: 4) so that increasingly, women use body practices of fitness – which she describes in terms of discourses of 'healthism' (ibid: 2) – to control their bodies 'in the service of normative femininity' (ibid). Thus as Goffman states, the body is central to 'the presentation of self in everyday life' (1959 (1990), title page), and the context of everyday life is increasingly governed by the imperatives of consumer culture which dictate that 'unprecedented value is placed on the youthful, trim and sexual body' (Shilling 2003: 3; see also Gill's 2007, 2009 discussion on the sexualisation of women's bodies in the media). The body, and in particular the female body, must also perform as an object of display (see Wearing 2007, Bartky 1990, Coupland 2003) for the surveillance and judgement of the cultural gaze. Moreover, at the level both of individual lived experience and cultural perception, the body has acquired the status of 'physical capital'¹⁹ on which social competence and individual worth are judged. Coupland argues that for women, the body is also the location of their 'symbolic capital' (2003: 129), that cultural judgements of the body

¹⁹ The term 'physical capital' is a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1978) through which he analyses the role of the body in post-modern society, conceptualising it as a 'possessor of power and status' (Shilling 2003: 111), and which plays a complex role in sustaining wider power structures and social inequalities. Its use here relates Bourdieu's concept to the notion of appearance as a component of 'physical capital'.

are, and remain, fundamentally gendered; there are numerous examples in day-to-day media discourses of the more rigorous evaluative mechanisms which are applied to women as opposed to men (see chapter 7 of this study) which suggest that it remains a taken-for-granted aspect of contemporary Western culture that women are still judged on the basis of appearance to a greater extent than men.

As discussed above, expectations of the body as the vehicle of self-identity have intensified as technologies have developed which allow ever-greater degrees of control over the body (see Shilling 2003, Davis 1995, Nettleton and Watson 1998, Carter 2014). Davis characterises the body in the consumer culture of late modernity as an entity ‘which can – and perhaps is increasingly expected - to ‘be endlessly manipulated [...] to meet prevailing fashions and cultural values’ (1995: 17). However the possibilities for transformation offered by technology come with increased pressure to undertake such regimes of body-work. This in turn has engendered an element of existential uncertainty with regard to the role of the body in the construction of self-identity (see Giddens 1991, Shilling 2003, Nettleton and Watson 1998). Shilling articulates the paradox of control and doubt:

We now have the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control over bodies, yet we are also living in an age which has thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should control them (2003: 3)

The conflicting impulses of desire (for control) and doubt (as to motivation and outcome) are visible in the language used by participants in this study as they talk about and evaluate their bodies as vehicles of self-identity (see chapters 4 and 5). However, of ‘the tribulations of the self’ (Giddens 1991: 181) which in contemporary culture threaten the integrity of self-identity, the process of ageing is arguably the most potent. Carter reports that for many of the women in her study ‘aging symbolises a loss of control over their bodies’ (2014: 9) which, she argues, engenders a feeling of personal responsibility for regulating the body by improving health and fitness – thereby warding off ageing; this speaks to the postfeminist discourses of individualism, agency, self-surveillance and focus on the body already discussed in 2.0 above. Cultural preoccupation with the body creates a focus for the ‘...obsession in western culture on the appearance of the body as the dominant signifier of old age’ (Woodward 1991: 10). This has important implications for ageing and identity (see above and below). As discussed in section 2.2.3, this collective obsession is frequently reinforced at a cultural level, for example via the rise over the past two decades of television

makeover shows (see Coupland and Gwyn 2003, Wearing 2007) which disseminate complex and contradictory attitudes towards ageing. Furthermore, the notion of a unified self, in which the body is considered to be an adequate vehicle for the expression of the inner self, has been appropriated by mass-media discourses and transformed into the cultural myth of ‘being in one’s prime’. This notion, which pervades the language of popular culture, delineates a limited period of young adulthood, generally extending from mid-twenties to mid-thirties, which is characterised, if not idealised, in these discourses as the phase of the lifecourse when, briefly, the (youthful) body and the self are harmoniously unified in the production of self-identity. However, these same discourses position this as a peak which is succeeded by an inevitable decline, physically, but often also in terms of personal and professional relevance. This culturally constructed sequence of peak followed by decline is very powerful in shaping women’s expectations of the ageing process (see chapter 4 below). Through the course of the mid-life period onwards, a different cultural narrative heralds the start of the breakdown of the unity of body and self. The visible signs of ageing, discursively constructed as ‘bodily betrayals’ (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 178) signal a different relationship between body and self-identity, one which is particularly problematic for women in their day-to-day lived experience because of the way it is dealt with in the public discourses through which cultural attitudes to ageing are expressed.

2.3.3 Cultural responses to the ageing body

Old age is one of the discontents of our civilisation (Woodward 1991: 10)

we will watch ourselves grow invisible to youth worshippers, and to the male gaze (Heilbrun 1991: 56, cited in Woodward 1999: xiv)

As Woodward’s words suggest, discontent is one of the ‘master narratives’ (Gullette 1997: 9) shaping the quotidian reality of ageing. Many commentators suggest that cultural attitudes to ageing are based on repression; Woodward applies a psychoanalytical perspective to argue that repression and denial are symptomatic of deep personal and collective anxieties about death but also of vulnerability and as Heilbrun’s words (see above) indicate, of being designated unworthy of the cultural gaze. Woodward contends that culture’s desire to deny the reality of ageing both structures, and is structured by the way ageing – and the ageing

body - is talked about and represented in cultural discourses:

The aging body as imagined and experienced and the aging body as represented structure each other in endless and reciprocal reverberation (1991: 5)

Paradoxically, although the collective desire may be to repress and deny ageing, images of the ageing body are ubiquitous in day-to-day life, therefore the cultural meanings they encode are inescapable; the power of the cultural visual repertoire to create and perpetuate stereotypes of ageing in ways which directly influence individual expectations and experience of ageing is a central theme in the literature (see Hazan 2000, Faircloth 2003, Bytheway 2003). Hazan argues that the images with which culture surrounds ageing/older people engender fundamental questions about individuals' ability to determine self-identity in that the stereotypes they encode can become self-fulfilling. Similarly, Faircloth observes that the framework of visual semiotic resources which express cultural expectations of ageing appearance and behaviour become the yardstick by which 'we actually assess whether we are old or not' (2003: 18); not only that, as Faircloth further argues, through the implicit evaluations contained within the "reality" they represent, many of the images of age and ageing in current culture provide a visual focus for deep-seated collective and personal fears and anxieties. Woodward comments on the paucity of representations of ageing which express 'tolerance' (1991:8) or genuine acceptance, and this is further illustrated by recent mass-media and advertising discourses in which apparent celebration of age disguises the covert message that its visual signs must be effaced for the judgement of the cultural gaze²⁰. Ann Kaplan uses her (1999) analysis of three iconic ageing women²¹ in the context of cinema and television portrayals to develop her premise that ageing is experienced (at least by white Western women) as 'trauma' (1999: 171); she contends that it is through representations of ageing which portray the 'abjection' (ibid: 188) of the body altered by its effects, that culture attempts to deal with its fears, stating that

much is at stake in aging, therefore, both for women experiencing age as "trauma", and for a culture fixated on youthfulness and so terrified of death that it erects defenses that are not, ultimately, in anyone's interest (1999:190).

²⁰ Examples of this phenomenon are too numerous to include in detail; however an article about the former model Twiggy (*The Sunday Times* 8th June 2014) 'Still out there at 60' exemplifies the widespread use of the qualifying 'still'; Dolly Parton and Cher are headlined as 'warriors in the war on age' in an article in *The Guardian* (15th May 2014) whose purpose is ostensibly a negative evaluation of the increasing use of cosmetic surgery to efface the "natural" signs of ageing.

²¹ Marlene Dietrich, Melanie Klein and Marguerite Duras

In a similar context, the *Journal of Celebrity Studies*, set up as a vehicle for analysing celebrity culture as a major growth area for humanities and social sciences, produced a special issue (March 2012) on female celebrity and ageing, featuring a number of papers exploring the complex (sometimes futile) navigations performed by female celebrities to accommodate ageing within other dimensions of their self-identity, recording their often angst-ridden defence of their 'physical capital' (see above).

The texts and images through which culture constructs its attitudes to ageing serve to illustrate Gullette's statement that 'whatever happens in the body, human beings are aged by culture first of all' (1997: 3). However, the culturally constructed decline narrative is inescapably bound up with biology, although Gullette's (1997) constructionist perspective draws a distinction between the decline of the physical body and the cultural ideology of decline, which as Hepworth observes is used to make a 'wide range of spurious links between variable biological changes that take place as the body changes' (2003: 99, see also below). Nonetheless, the biological model of ageing, which originated in the scientific and medical discourses of the mid-nineteenth century, transformed perceptions of the body making it the object of 'scientific scrutiny' (Hepworth 2003: 90) and reinterpreting disease as a symptom of ageing. Thus as Hepworth (2003) argues:

the modern aged body was separated out from the body of youth and other stages of life as a degenerative or dying body (2003: 90)

One of the consequences of this medical-professional gaze has been the emergence of the notion of the separation and separateness of the ageing/aged body; this has had a wide-ranging cultural impact, as Grenier's (2012) analysis of transition in the lifecourse demonstrates (see section 2.1.1 above), fuelling the cultural binarism discussed in section 2.1.2, which positions health and old age as polar opposites. The medicalisation of ageing has led directly to the creation of what Hepworth terms the 'biomedical model of decline', which remains a powerfully influential force in current culture, as the prevalence of commentary in both academic and the wider domain of the media attests. This is an essentially reductionist model of ageing:

...Fixation of the professional gaze upon the ageing body excluded visions of ageing as a complex 'polysemic' moral process involving [...] The result was that the diverse human experience of ageing was gradually reduced to a single biomedical model of decline as defined by the unifying, disciplinary scrutiny of an expanding band of medical experts (2003: 90)

Gullette (1997) argues that the cultural decline narrative is a device for problematising the “normal” decline of the body in old age, thereby becoming, as Hepworth states, a means of connecting a diverse range of bodily changes to ‘an imaginary story of comprehensive and universal decline’ (Hepworth 2003: 99). The impact of the catch-all effect of the decline narrative can be directly tracked in the language used by participants in this study to evaluate their experience of ageing, particularly in the intimacy of the mirror moment (see 5.1 below), in which every bodily change is attributed to the process of ageing, and as a result universally negatively evaluated. The legacy of this ‘unifying, disciplinary scrutiny’ has shaped the language of ageing and therefore cultural attitudes to ageing in other significant ways, blurring the perceptual and linguistic boundaries between decline as part of the “normal” process of ageing and decline as a consequence of disease. Thus in addition to being reduced to a unitary process of decline, ageing has also been pathologised by these discourses, with far-reaching effects: the culturally generated ‘age ideology’ (Gullette 1997:3) which conflates the language of ageing with the language of illness²², has become another ‘master narrative’ (Gullette *ibid*: 9), creating cultural as well as individual expectations that if ageing is like illness then it can be “cured” by regimes of body work, and lifelong investment in the ‘body project’ (Shilling 2003: 4)²³. The discourses of consumerism, particularly as they are directed towards women, play a complex role; as the lens of cultural attitudes they perpetuate the master narrative of age-as-decline and at the same time the notion of ageing as curable - or at least controllable. In the appearance-based resistance narratives which characterise mass-media communication, body work not only represents ‘the skilled practices and routines [of] accomplishing femininity’ (Smith 1988: 45), but through discourses which present the female body as ‘the forever imperfect actuality [...] to be groomed, dressed and painted’ (*ibid*: 53), femininity itself is invoked as a weapon against ageing. In this way discourses of youthfulness/health/beauty/femininity are more firmly conjoined, further reinforcing collective perceptions of the antithetical relationship between beauty and ageing.

²² This is exemplified by some of the discourses concerning Alzheimer’s disease (i.e. Gubrium (1986) *Old Timers and Alzheimer’s: the Descriptive Organisation of Senility*

²³ Interestingly this debate has very recently been taken up by the media; an article in *The Sunday Times* (11/7/15) speculates whether ageing is a normal bodily process or ‘is old age merely the name we give to the diseases and breakdowns we accumulate as we grow older?’

Thus the current cultural context is, in many ways, a complex and uncertain environment in which to grow older. In commenting on Gullette's work, Hepworth argues that the balance she identifies 'between ageing bodies and a culture that ages' (Hepworth 2003: 10) is emblematic of a fundamental cultural conflict between ideologies of ageing: the biological model which characterises ageing as a process of decline and the social constructionist model, which Gullette and other commentators (see Woodward 1999, 2006) argue strongly for, which constructs age and ageing more positively as a process of change and personal growth. That said, it could be argued that cultural attitudes towards ageing are in the process of shifting, albeit slightly, as detectable in the greater prominence given to positive role models of ageing women in different domains of public life, and in a more positively constructed vocabulary of ageing: examples include the 2007 advertising campaign by the Dove brand (see footnote 3); the 2013 Channel 4 documentary on the *Fabulous Fashionistas* (see chapter 7 of this present study); and initiatives such as the 2013 launch of the Charter against Ageism and Sexism in the Media. An additional corollary of the shift in the cultural landscape, as noted in chapter 1, has been a developing sub-genre of mid-life acceptance narratives²⁴ (for which Gullette's (1997) work *Declining to Decline*, which contains a substantial amount of autobiographical material, may have been a forerunner). However, it could equally be argued that even these changes in cultural attitudes and the broadening visual and linguistic vocabulary of ageing, have yet to bring about substantive changes in individual attitudes to ageing; the private voices analysed in this study show the extent to which the decline narrative remains pre-eminent in shaping individual responses to ageing, dominating the mirror moments (see 5.1 below) in which women in particular, evaluate their own ageing.

2.3.4 Individual responses to ageing

Within this complex and problematic cultural environment, in which powerful institutional and consumer discourses continue to appropriate the process of ageing, ageing nonetheless remains first and foremost an intensely personal experience, lived day-to-day through the immediate reality of the body. Whilst ageing is understood most immediately and personally

²⁴ Jane Shilling's (2011) autobiographical account *The Stranger in the Mirror: A memoir of Middle Age*, and India Knight's (2012) fictionalised account *Mutton*, and most recently Helen Walmsley-Johnson's *The Invisible Woman* (2015) are examples of this growing sub-genre.

as a physical process revealed through the changing appearance of the body, cultural discourses dictate how individuals interpret and evaluate the signs of ageing on their own bodies; indeed, given the dominance of the prevailing cultural age ideology (see above), it is a moot point whether individuals can be said to have ownership of their own ageing process, and this may be particularly true for women. As previously discussed, the problematic status of the ageing female body means that it is positioned by public discourses as well as private voices as being in conflict with cultural standards of feminine beauty.

Within the field of the sociology of ageing there are a limited number of studies which have investigated how people conceptualise ageing in terms of their own experience; as observed in 2.0 above, this work has not been replaced by more recent scholarship and continues to provide an empirical perspective to a field which has traditionally been defined by largely theoretical gerontological and institutional perspectives, and, as importantly, gives insights into the nature of the challenge which ageing presents to individual identity projects (see Oberg 2003, Wearing 2007). The more nuanced exploration which has resulted from this work on ageing has enabled a greater understanding of how, in terms of lived experience, people make sense of, and talk about, what is ‘at once a universal, ‘diverse’ and yet ‘vague’ human condition’ (Hepworth 2003: 92). A central theme to emerge from this body of research is the perception amongst individuals that the process of ageing causes a separation to occur between the inner self and the outer body, which in turn causes them to be viewed as separate, although connected, entities. Eileen Fairhurst’s (1998) study of the social construction of older women reported ‘an important distinction between the physical body and the self: the two were seen as two separate entities’ (1998: 268). Significantly, the individuals in her study made a distinction between the changing outward appearance of the body, generally evaluated negatively, and the inner self, viewed as separate from – and untouched by – these physical changes, and therefore positively evaluated as a truer, ‘more enduring’ (ibid) representation of self-identity (see also 4.2.4 of the present study). Robert Kastenbaum’s (1972) study *The Ages of Me*, which remains an influential and relevant reference point, examines how people define and assess age, identifying two constructs of ageing. His findings, broadly in line with those of Fairhurst’s study, show that participants conceptualise age in terms of ‘personal age’ (i.e. age as subjectively experienced) and ‘interpersonal age’ (i.e. age as judged by the external gaze) (1972: 197). Personal age is made

up of 'look age' which can be understood as how old a person thinks they look to the outside world, and 'feel age', which expresses age as it is experienced by the inner subjective self and is, he suggests, considered by participants to be a more accurate indicator of their "real" age. Furthermore, it seems that personal age is regarded as a separate concept from chronological age, generally reported as younger than chronological age, a disparity which increases through the lifecourse. These findings are supported by more recent studies (e.g. Oberg and Tornstam (1999)). Interestingly, a number of recent media items reinforce the notion of separate domains of ageing, and which seem to use the voice of (quasi)-science to give prominence to biological ageing as the more reliable indicator of a person's "true" age, e.g. 'How well are you ageing? These are the tests to take' (*Sunday Times Health* August 11th 2015) and 'Tests show how old your body really is' (James Gallagher, September 7th 2015 www.bbc.co.uk/news/health).

This research describes a subjective experience of ageing which is complex and multi-dimensional, in which there may be a number of different selves – captured in Gullette's notion of the 'portmanteau "me"' (1997: 213) - involved in the process of identity construction, a process which is not fixed but changing and evolving, even through later stages of the lifecourse, and which, as the lifecourse progresses, is in increasing conflict with cultural attitudes towards ageing. Featherstone and Hepworth use the metaphor of the 'mask of ageing' (1988: 371) to articulate the disjunction which exists between the diverse and polysemic nature of individual experience of ageing and the uniformity imposed by cultural perceptions and expectations:

old age is [...] seen to be characteristically defined as a mask which conceals the essential identity of the person beneath (1988: 379)

Not only that, but the essential self beneath the mask is also conceptualised as the youthful self (ibid, see also Faircloth 2003, Oberg 2003), existing in an ever-increasing disunity with the body as it ages. The mask of ageing thus represents the separation of the ageing body from a culture constructed around the values of youth, but also the breach in the integrity of self-identity which occurs as the ageing outer body and the inner self are increasingly perceived to be in opposition. Featherstone and Hepworth comment that

The individual struggle to maintain a balance between the external stereotypes of age-appropriate behaviour and the subjective experience of the self requires considerable energy, tenacity and other resources (1988 (1991): 378)

An individual's stance on ageing is linguistically constructed as a 'struggle' even before bodily changes make this a physical reality. The vocabulary people choose in order to articulate their experience, as indicated by the corpus of interview data gathered for this study (see chapters 4 and 5), suggests that complex and conflicted attitudes to the ageing process begin in the second decade of the lifecourse and persist into deep old age. Featherstone and Hepworth comment on the 'deficiency' (1988 (1991): 382) of the vocabulary of ageing available to elderly people for expressing the diversity of their subjective experiences of ageing (see also Faircloth 2003); however, it could also be argued that this linguistic deficiency and uncertainty begins far earlier in the lifecourse, in the fluid conditions of the 'new middle age' (Featherstone and Hepworth *ibid*: 385). The cultural vocabulary of ageing is not only limited in scope and subtlety, but also by the pre-eminence of the decline narrative which seems to be the overriding influence on individual responses to ageing from a relatively early age; in this way the negativity which characterises them becomes part of the taken-for-granted evaluative infrastructure of wider culture.

2.4 Summary

The review of the theoretical and cultural context for my thesis suggests that despite some shifts in cultural attitudes, the continuing dominance of the decline narrative means that at the level of lived experience, ageing remains a powerful source of 'identity trouble'; identity, theorised as a multiplex, non-unitary category of difference, is constantly under threat of submersion by age, culturally constructed as 'a category of similarity and uniformity' (Hepworth 2003: 99). Furthermore, the reciprocal impact of gender and age identity is characterised by uncertainty and unease, both in terms of personal evaluations and public discourses. The uncertainty which surrounds individual projects of the self (see Shilling 2003) is perpetuated and reinforced by the contradictory nature of cultural discourses of ageing in which the ageing body as a signifier of decline sits alongside the 'unrelenting body' (Grenier 2012: 92) on which models of successful ageing are based. The so-called 'makeover culture' which has become a feature of television and media discourses over the last decade is a symptom of the deep-seated cultural paradox which seemingly celebrates age/ing whilst simultaneously requiring its visible signs to be effaced. In a cultural environment in which the body has become the identity, the trajectory for the construction of female age identity remains uncertain. In visual and linguistic representations of ideal female beauty, a beautiful

body is a youthful body, thus the ageing female body remains the focus of collective ambivalence; it is problematised in the resistance narratives of mass-media and advertising communication, and policed by rigid cultural “rules” which govern the performance of ageing femininity, imposing on women a complex series of balances which must be achieved if their ageing bodies are to conform to the conventions of ageing femininity:

acknowledgement, disguise, acceptance and resistance. It can still be argued that ageing in the current culture remains a more difficult process for women than for men. Moreover, the pervasiveness of ‘the biomedical model of decline’ (Hepworth 2003: 90 see also above) and its linguistic impact on most domains of everyday life, leaves both women - and men - little opportunity or inducement to reconceptualise their own ageing process; therefore gender and age remain ‘troublesome dichotomies’, structuring each other ideologically and discursively in ways which challenge the role of both as markers of identity. These themes re-emerge in the data analysis of chapters 4-7.

Thus in establishing the context of study for my thesis, I have drawn relatively little from the extensive literature on gender and language because as discussed in 2.0, research in this field has either not specifically addressed language of/about older women, or has not distinguished between age groups, or has not factored gender in as a linguistic variable. Instead I have had to draw on other areas of enquiry, and on cultural studies perspectives in particular, in order to set out a meaningful disciplinary context for my research. The limited number of studies which deal specifically with the language used by/about older women could arguably form the basis of an important subfield within the broader field of language and gender, which as already stated is under-theorised and under-exploited, and to which this thesis aims to contribute.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND ANALYTIC FRAMEWORKS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by setting out the detail of the datasets already briefly outlined in chapter 1, describing the specific methods and rationale underlying the selection and approach to each dataset, and the role each plays in addressing particular research objectives. It then shows how the theoretical, linguistic and critical starting-points of this thesis as discussed in chapter 1, have determined the structuring of the data into private and public voices, and how this is translated into the analytical frameworks applied to the individual datasets, a process which has created the infrastructure for subsequent interpretation and discussion of the data in chapters 4-7. The diverse ideas discussed in chapter 2, which establish the cultural context for this study, highlight its complexity both in terms of its multi-disciplinary nature and the range and breadth of data involved in answering the research questions; this has required a variety of methodological approaches and analytical tools. For clarity and convenience this chapter brings together description of the theoretical and linguistic frameworks drawn on for the data analysis, together with details of individual datasets and methods of data collection etc. However, there is a key point to be made concerning my fundamental approach to the data: I have drawn on different frameworks and analytical techniques as a means of enabling explanation and interpretation of the data, rather than with the aim of using the data to prove the validity of a theoretical model or an analytical approach. Therefore, whilst different linguistic and theoretical frameworks have generated useful and relevant ways of looking at the data, and introduced systematic structures for analysis and interpretation, I have chosen not to apply them rigidly to the analysis in order to avoid artificially constraining the complex flow of ideas and recurring themes involved – particularly those emerging from the real voices of the participants in the study. In short, the data has been allowed to tell its own story. Section 3.1 gives an overview of the interview data - the private voices - and section 3.2 discusses the datasets concerned with the public discourses of ageing. Section 3.3 outlines the general linguistic and theoretical frameworks drawn on in the analysis.

3.1 Private voices: conversational interview data

As already stated in chapter 1, this dataset is composed of a series of qualitative face-to-face interviews and is used to address research questions (i) and (ii) (see chapter 1) which explore participants' linguistic evaluations of their experiences of ageing. A qualitative approach was felt to be the most appropriate method of gathering this data, particularly given its potentially sensitive and personal nature; as Litosseliti and Leadbeater comment

qualitative research focuses on allowing research participants to explore, in their own words, issues, beliefs, values and experiences in relation to the research questions posed. (2011: 93)

The interview format was consciously modelled on the 'conversational research interview' (Enk 2009: 1266): that is, an informal and semi-structured interaction, which, furthermore, was predicated on a different model from the historical conceptualisation of the interview as 'a unilaterally guided means of excavating information' (Gubrium and Holstein 2012: 27). Here, the role of the interviewer is as co-collaborator in the process, and the role of the participant as an active and empowered subject, rather than the more traditional 'vessel of answers', as described in Gubrium and Holstein's analysis of the changing context of research interviews (2012: 32). A significant factor in this changing context is the ubiquity of the research interview in contemporary society; Gubrium and Holstein, referencing Silverman (1997) call this the 'interview society' (2012: 31) and this brings two significant implications: for individuals 'experience is increasingly generated and mediated by the interview' (ibid) but more importantly, 'the self [emerges] as a proper object of narration' (ibid: 30). Prior to each interview I sought to mobilise participants' taken-for-granted background knowledge of the interview as a site for personal narration, by encouraging them to think of it "as a conversation", both as a means of signalling a request for intimacy and as a way of framing the interview as a socially situated interaction and a suitable forum for authentic disclosure which could be assumed to resemble some features of "ordinary" conversation such as 'a preference for agreement' (Enk 2009: 1270), and for supportive rather than adversarial interaction. I conducted each interview within the context of the reconceptualisation of interview roles in which, as Gubrium and Holstein argue,

... the active subject behind the interviewer is a necessary counterpart, a working narrative partner, of the active subject behind the respondent (2012: 33)

In planning my approach to the interviews in terms of content, my own role as interviewer and status as a mid-life woman (see 2.1.1 above) I was mindful of the risk of research bias, as discussed by Platt (2012), also referred to as the ‘interviewer effect’ (Singleton Jr. and Straits 2012:78)²⁵ whereby the presence or behaviour of the interviewer can unduly influence participants’ responses. Whilst it may not be possible to negate this phenomenon entirely, I took steps and employed strategies to minimise its effect. Firstly, in terms of the information given to participants at the recruitment stage, I provided a brief, general description of the research topic using deliberately neutral language (i.e. potential participants were simply told that this was a project investigating individual experiences of ageing). In addition, the range of stimulus material I used in the interviews to facilitate and focus discussion (see Appendix II) aimed to present as balanced an overview as possible of media and advertising discourses of gender and ageing around the interview period. By not giving undue prominence to a particular stance or set of attitudes participants were free to comment, evaluate and interpret freely as they articulated their own experiences.

Secondly, I carefully considered how my role as interviewer might intersect with my own evident presence as a mid-life woman. As discussed above, I based my approach as interviewer on the model of the researcher as ‘active interviewer’ (Lillrank 2012: 281, see also Gubrium and Holstein 2012), who according to Lillrank ‘facilitates the interview interaction to direct and harness the respondents’ constructive storytelling to the research task at hand’ (2012: 281). Similarly, Platt describes the active interviewer as ‘provid[ing] an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues and not be confined by predetermined agendas’ (2012: 21). In order to fulfil this role in a manner which allowed a balance of necessary detachment from what Lillrank terms ‘one’s own hypothetical framework’ (ibid: 283), whilst actively engaging with participants to facilitate their contributions, I consciously employed a range of linguistic/interactional techniques: this is what Lillrank summarises as ‘the management of an interviewer self’ (ibid: 282). Thus techniques such as active listening and Lillrank’s notion of ‘the helping voice’ (ibid: 283) facilitated conversational collaboration whilst maintaining focus on participants’ narratives and thereby minimising the risk of detecting a research - or

²⁵ Cf. Stubbs’ reference to ‘the observer’s paradox’ (1983: 224)

researcher - bias. Indeed according to Platt, research carried out on respondent/ interviewer perceptions of each other suggests that ‘respondents do not necessarily detect the interviewers’ biases’ (2012: 20). I felt that my status as an mid-life woman would be advantageous in terms of the interpersonal dynamics of the interview, as a means of facilitating intimacy (see Johnson and Rowlands 2012) with mid-life and older participants, in that I was able to offer some kind of ‘complementary reciprocity’ of experience (Johnson and Rowlands 2012: 104), and with younger participants, in that as an older woman I could neutralise any perceptions of possible power asymmetries related to the potential competitiveness and judgements which might be associated with an interviewer perceived to be in their peer group. As I acknowledge in chapter 8 below, inviting a group of participants to reflect on their own experiences of ageing necessarily creates a tendency to problematise this process, perhaps partly due to the nature of the interview situation in which there may be a correlation between negative evaluation and perceptions of honesty/authenticity. However, this in itself can also be seen as symptomatic of the powerful influence of cultural attitudes towards ageing; the consistency of the findings discussed in the chapters which follow argues that this commonality of attitudes and evaluations is a result of cultural impositions rather than the influence of any discernible research agenda on my part.

Over a four-month period (September - December 2011) I carried out 19 conversational interviews with participants ranging in age from 21 - 80 (more detailed participant profiles are provided below). As the focus of the analysis is women’s experience of ageing, of the 19 participants 17 were female, with 2 male participants included for the purposes of comparison. All interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis with the exception of one in which two sisters, both in their early 20s, opted to be interviewed together. The interview data is analysed in chapters 4 and 5.

3.1.1 Recruitment

In order to recruit participants I used a variety of professional and social networks. An initial email was sent out explaining the nature of the project in general terms and asking for volunteers to take part in a research interview. The research questions outlined in chapter 1 do not specify a particular age-range for participants; my observation of the ubiquity and nature of skincare advertisements such as those analysed in chapter 6 of this study powerfully

suggests that ageing is viewed in these public discourses as a phenomenon which affects women as early as the second decade, remaining a lifelong concern, and that the cultural problematisation of ageing, historically focused through media/advertising discourses on mid-life women, is not by any means solely confined to this age cohort. Thus I felt it was important to reflect the broad influence of such cultural messages of ageing; my recruitment priority was therefore to cover a span of age categories (albeit within the constraints of a limited sample) in order to be able to capture a breadth of individual perspectives on ageing throughout the lifecourse. Potential participants contacted me directly if they were willing to take part so that the participants self-recruited; this is significant in that this was an active choice for each of them, and indeed many emphasised in their replies that they were keen to talk about their experiences of ageing and had strong views on the matter. It is also significant that proportionally more people from the mid-life cohort approached me, indicating a level of engagement/preoccupation with ageing amongst these individuals which suggested a rationale for a primary focus on this group of mid-life participants (i.e. aged between 42 and 56). This approach had a number of benefits: using the interview data as a corpus of commentary to be mined rather than just an exploration of a particular participant allowed me to examine a specific age cohort whilst also drawing on data from the other age groups for points of comparison and contextualisation. I felt this avoided the potential limitations of a sole focus on a single group of individuals. The mid-life cohort is particularly significant in terms of this study in that these individuals are transitioning between youth and (old) age, occupying a fluidly defined lifestage in which they are positioned by their own and culture's perception as no longer young but not yet old, and as argued in 4.1 below, this lifestage brings particular challenges to the process of identity construction. However, as analysis will show, the mid-life needs also to be understood in terms of its place in the lifecourse as a whole. Prospective evaluations of mid-life by younger age cohorts together with retrospective and comparative evaluations by the mid-lifers themselves as well as the older participants in the sample enabled a broader and more nuanced analysis of the different aspects of ageing which I felt was required in order to address the research questions.

Age therefore was the criterion on which I made selections from the initial (much larger) group of volunteers. Inevitably this means that in terms of other markers of identity such as ethnicity, socio-demographic status, educational background etc, this is a relatively narrow

sample; a wider or more diverse sample whilst undoubtedly yielding useful insights and perspectives would be beyond the scope of the present study, but offers opportunities for future research (see chapter 8). Project participants were provided with documentation comprising a more detailed project description, a code of ethics including data protection procedures and consent form for signature, after which dates and times for the interview were arranged.²⁶

3.1.2 Summary participant profiles

In order to ensure participant confidentiality, to comply with requirements of data protection, and to establish a clear means of referencing extracts from participants' accounts, a system of participant coding was developed whereby each participant was identified by a unique discriminator which indicated gender, age and ranking in the total sample; e.g. F9-48 signifies a 48 year-old female participant who is listed as 9th in the total sample of 19 (see Table 1 below). It is worth noting that a number of the (potential) participants recommended friends and family members to take part, so that the sample developed organically, built on a network of interpersonal relationships which is shown in Table 1 below. This has added a dimension to the analysis in giving access to more intimate evaluations between participants who are related or known to each other.

Participant coding reference	Age	Gender	Relationship to other participants	Nationality	Educational level	Professional status
F1-21	21	female	sister of F2-23	British	Tertiary	Student
F2- 23	23	female	sister of F1-21	British	Tertiary	Events organiser
F3- 23	23	female	daughter of F11-54	British/American (resident in UK since childhood)	Tertiary	Brand Manager
F4-36	36	female		Swedish (resident in UK for 5 years)	Tertiary	Marketing Director
F5-38	38	female		British	Tertiary	Paediatrician
F6-42	42	female		British	Tertiary	Freelance consultant
F7-44	44	female	wife of M18-44	British	Secondary	Finance Director
F8-45	45	female		British	Tertiary	Commercial Director

²⁶ The University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Panel confirmed approval of the project.

F9-48	48	female	daughter-in-law of F17-80	British	tertiary	Self-employed recruitment consultant
F10-49	49	female	friend of F13-56	British	tertiary	Entrepreneur
F11-54	54	female	mother of F3-23	American (resident in UK for 15 years)	tertiary	Chief Marketing Officer
F12-56	56	female		British	tertiary	Professional photographer
F13-56	56	female	friend of F10-49	British	tertiary	Design and Sales Director
F14- 64	64	female		South African (resident in UK for 30 years)	tertiary	Self-employed inventory clerk
F15-75	75	female	friend of F16-80	British	tertiary	Retired nurse & health visitor
F16- 80	80	female	friend of F15-75	British	tertiary	Retired nurse & health visitor
F17-80	80	female	mother-in-law of F9-48	British	secondary	Retired counsellor
M18 44	44	male	Husband to F7-44	British	tertiary	Marketing consultant
M19 53	53	male	friend of F15-75's husband	British	secondary	Quality control manager

Table 1: summary participant profiles

3.1.3 Data collection

The interviews took place in a location chosen by the participant, either their home or office meeting room. One interview took place in a quiet hotel coffee shop due to the participant's travel schedule. Interviews were on average an hour in duration and were recorded using a specialist Sony MP3 recording device. Permission was obtained beforehand for the recording, and participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time, in which case all data would be destroyed. Participants were also assured that the process complied with standard data protection procedures (i.e. anonymised transcription, data ownership, secure data storage). As explained in 3.1.1 above, the interviews were semi-structured in format, following a loose discussion guide whose purpose was to shape the flow of the interview, allowing comparability of data without constraining or over-directing participants' responses. A selection of stimulus material was used during the interview: e.g. current articles concerned with age/ageing taken from newspapers and lifestyle media, images of older female and male public figures and celebrities, and a small selection of anti-ageing advertisements, some of

which have been analysed as part of the examination of skincare advertising in chapter 6 of this study.²⁷ The data from each interview was uploaded as a digital file onto a laptop to which only I have access and labelled numerically to ensure participant confidentiality. I transcribed and subsequently analysed all the interview data personally and in accordance with the requirements of data protection, anonymised all names, places and other personal references. In addition, arrangements have been made to store the data securely both during and following the completion of the thesis.

3.2 Public discourses

The public discourses analysed in this study are made up of 2 datasets: anti-ageing advertising texts, and texts taken from lifestyle media and a TV documentary. I used these datasets primarily to address research question (iii), which explores how ageing women are represented in media and advertising communication, and to a more limited extent research question (iv), which seeks to compare the ways in which women are represented versus men. The selection of these texts was informed by Fairclough's notion of the circularity of discourse i.e. that discourses exist in relation to other discourses in a complex and fluid network in which discourses can be conflicting, supporting, competing etc (see 3.3.1 below). I translated this principle directly into my approach to the datasets. In the course of analysing the spoken data, it became clear that there were a number of themes which recurred consistently across many individual accounts and which appeared to have particular salience for many participants. These were specific: i.e. the debate around grey hair, the menopause, the power/significance of chronological age. There were also more general preoccupations, less explicitly articulated but nonetheless expressing powerful motifs underlying their viewpoints: i.e. how ageing women are represented versus young women, how older women are dealt with, particularly in skincare advertising. I therefore selected media and advertising texts which some way addressed these themes, so that analysis could explore the relationship between public discourses and private voices by examining participants' perspectives on a particular issue alongside media commentary on it. It is worth noting that the issues of particular interest to participants were also current and newsworthy at the time, which reinforces the importance of accommodating the circularity of discourse in the analytical

²⁷ Copies of the stimulus material used have been included in Appendix II, together with transcription conventions and a copy of the interview discussion guide.

process. I felt that I was able to track more concretely the nature and extent of the impact of such public discourses on individual language practice.

3.2.1 Anti-ageing skincare advertising

Participants expressed extremely strong views on skincare advertisements generally, and anti-ageing advertising in particular, which revealed deep tensions between an inherent cynicism regarding stereotypical representations of women, and a desire at some level to conform to such stereotypes (see 5.2.3 below and chapter 6). Thus in selecting the advertising texts for this dataset it was important to reflect participants' views whilst broadly representing the brands and discourses which define and dominate this market. I therefore applied van Leeuwen's principle of 'inventorizing' (2005: 6) i.e. building up a collection of texts in order to be able to identify 'the set of semiotic choices that typify a given context' (ibid: 14) and which constitute what van Leeuwen terms a 'semiotic register' (ibid). In this way, even given the necessarily small scale of this dataset it has been possible to develop a deeper understanding of differences and commonalities in meaning potential, how semiotic rules can appear to be manipulated, and to what effect. However, given the constraints imposed by the scope of the present study it should be viewed as a series of case histories which allow qualitative comparisons of different communicative approaches to anti-ageing, rather than as a quantitatively valid dataset.

The selected advertisements therefore represent the dynamics of the skincare market in terms of brands featured, consumer trends, segmentation, price points, and distribution channels, and the advertising campaigns themselves reflect significant themes for participants: the gendered nature of anti-ageing advertising; the problematisation of "early" ageing; discourses of science' and emerging counter-discourses (see chapter 6). Whilst the majority of advertisements are aimed at female consumers, a limited selection of male-targeted advertisements has been included to provide a point of comparison and to incorporate perspectives from the rapidly growing male skincare market. The female-targeted advertising texts typify the campaigns of L'Oréal Paris, Lancôme, Estée Lauder, Clarins and Boots; the male-targeted advertisements are from the L'Oréal Paris and Sisley brands. L'Oréal Paris and Lancôme, although both owned by the same parent company, occupy different market positionings: L'Oréal Paris is a mass-market high street brand, whilst Lancôme occupies a

premium positioning and is only available through department stores. Both brands segment their product offers to appeal to a relatively wide consumer age span (20 to 50+). Estée Lauder, also operating in the premium sector, has historically targeted older (30 +) consumers. The Clarins brand's high-end market positioning is based on a specific consumer proposition involving natural plant-based ingredients; the anti-ageing advertisement chosen for analysis specifically targets younger (20+) consumers. By way of contrast, the Boots No 7 brand has been included because it represents a different communicative approach to ageing and, in that it is a retail rather than a corporate brand, offers a different branding model. The advertising campaigns ran at different points between 2010 and 2014, and were featured in a wide range of weekly and monthly lifestyle magazines in national distribution. The magazines ranged demographically from mid-range monthlies such as *Good Housekeeping* and to more premium-targeted titles such as *Cosmopolitan* and *GQ*.

3.2.2 Media texts

In a similar way, the selection of texts for this dataset was driven primarily by themes emerging from participants' accounts. I also sought to accommodate a reasonable span of demographic profiles where relevant and, importantly, of communicative modes, although given the complex, diverse and rapidly changing nature of the media domain, this could not realistically be a truly representative dataset. Thus the dataset as a whole should be considered as a series of small subsets summarised in the table below, each related to significant aspects of participants' experience, and translated into analytical themes which are explored in depth in chapter 7.

Analytical theme	Selected text(s)	Reader/viewer age profile (where relevant)
Representations of femininity	<i>Cosmopolitan</i> <i>Marie Claire</i> <i>Good Housekeeping</i> <i>Woman and Home</i>	Core reader 20-39 (source: Nielsen Media Index 2013) Average reader age 33 (source: www.ipcadvertising.com) Core reader 35 - 54 (source: www.campaignlive.co.uk) Average reader age 35+ (source: www.ipcmedia.com)
The grey hair debate	<i>Sunday Times Style Magazine</i> 2010 – 2014	
The power of the decade	<i>The Times</i> (12/2/12) <i>Daily Mail</i> (19/6/13)	
The menopause	<i>Daily Mail</i> (28/10/13) and (15/3/12) <i>Declining to Decline</i> (Gullette 1997) <i>The Change</i> (Greer 1991)	
Ageing femininities	Television documentary <i>The Fabulous Fashionistas</i> (September 2012) <i>Cosmopolitan</i> (Christmas 2012, July 2013) <i>Marie Claire</i> (Christmas 2012, July 2013) <i>Good Housekeeping</i> (Christmas 2012, July 2013) <i>Woman and Home</i> (Christmas 2012, July 2013) <i>The Telegraph</i> online (18/9/2013) <i>Daily Mail</i> online (15/11/2013)	Median reader age 31.3 (source: www.cosmomediamkit.com) Average reader age 30 (source: www.Vogue.co.uk) (see above) (see above)

Table 2: summary media texts

3.3 General linguistic and theoretical frameworks

In developing an approach to analysing my data, I have been mindful of a number of different methodologies which might have been applied (cf. Harrington, Litosseliti et al (2008)), and chose to draw on a combination of different theoretical and linguistic frameworks: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an overarching theoretical framework; Evaluation as a broad area of linguistic enquiry, and Appraisal Theory as a systemised framework for analysing it; and Multimodal Analysis as a framework for analysing visual modes of communication. As stated in 3.0 (above), these different approaches have informed and supported – rather than driven - the process of data analysis and interpretation.

3.3.1 Analysing Discourse

Whilst Fairclough's (2010) model of CDA has been a significant influence on my approach, this is not, and does not set out to be, a Critical Discourse Analysis study. However, as stated in 2.0 above, the notion of discourse is central to the investigation undertaken in this study

and its focus on the relationship between the public discourses which encode cultural attitudes gender and ageing, and the private voices of people's lived experiences (see chapters 1 and 2). The CDA model sees discourse as relational and dialectical in nature i.e. as existing in a complex set of relationships between discursive practice and social reality. Importantly for the purposes of this study, CDA offers a structure for examining discourses in terms of these networks of relations. Fairclough argues that:

‘discourse’ might be seen as some sort of entity or object, but is itself a complex set of relations including relations of communication between people who talk, write and in other ways communicate with each other, but also... describe relations between concrete communicative events (conversations, newspaper articles etc.)... but there are also relations between discourse and other complex ‘objects’ including objects in the physical world, persons, power relations and institutions (2010: 3)

This approach enables the analysis to go beyond the text, as Litosseliti states ‘to look at the relationship between text, discursive and social practices as mutually dependent and mutually constitutive. Thus in the context of this study, the notion of discourse as dialectic has provided a useful rationale for the methodological approach to the data (see above) in that the structuring of the datasets expresses the complex relations ‘between discourse and other complex ‘objects’’. Analytically, this means the ability to understand how discourses of gender and age structure each other in the enactment of the complex realities of power relations, and their effects on social practice as it is realised in the construction of individual gender and age identities.

Thus my investigation of the relationship between private voices and public discourses draws on the foundational ideas of CDA to structure the analysis: i.e. that there is a reciprocal relationship between language and ideology; that discourses are inseparable from the social context which produces them; that discourse is a product of the ideologies of the dominant culture, and therefore as Jeffries contends, ‘all discourse is ideologically saturated’ (2007:8) as well as ideologically situated. Fairclough argues that over time the ideologies encoded in discourses become normalised, unquestioned, viewed as non-ideological representations of “the way things are” (see chapter 1). The critical component of the CDA approach originates in the impetus to challenge what Fairclough terms the dominant ‘ideological-discursive formations’ (2010: 30) contained within social institutions. If, as Fairclough argues, ‘opacity is the other side of the coin of naturalisation’ (ibid: 38), then it is probable that in the course of everyday language practice individuals are typically unaware of the ideologies shaping the

stances they construct, or, as Fairclough (2010) and Thompson (1984) argue, of the wider power structures served by those ideologies. Thus as discussed in chapter 1, a principal aim of this study is to uncover and ‘denaturalise’ ideological representations of reality, through analysis of the complex relationship of the ‘micro events’ of private voices to the ‘macro structures’ of public discourses.

3.3.2 Identifying Evaluation

Michael Stubbs stated that ‘whenever speakers or writers say anything they encode their point of view towards it’ (1996: 202); the notion of evaluation incorporates a variety of linguistic concepts and features (i.e. stance, affect and modality), and has now generated a considerable body of scholarship. Hunston and Thompson (1999 (2003)) gather together the principal approaches to evaluation in order to argue for its centrality in descriptions of spoken and written language. They define evaluation as

.... the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values. (2003: 5)

These perspectives have shaped my research, structuring the research questions (see chapter 1) and specifically my analytical approach to the data, which is to identify and investigate linguistic features of evaluation, expressed as attitude, stance and feelings, as a way to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of private voices as well as public discourses of ageing.

The importance of evaluation goes beyond its immediate discursive function as the vehicle by which speaker/writer opinion is expressed, and beyond its interest to linguists as a feature of language in use; the view taken in this study is that evaluation is what links discourse to other ‘objects’ (see Fairclough 2010, also 3.2.1 above), and individual articulations to wider discursive structures. As Hunston and Thompson further argue

every act of evaluation expresses a communal value-system, and every act of evaluation goes towards building up that value-system. This value-system in turn is a component of the ideology which lies behind every text. Thus, identifying what the writer thinks reveals the ideology of the society that has produced the text (2003: 6)

Investigating how evaluation functions in spoken discourse, in which as Fairclough suggests, speakers may be, and perhaps typically are, unaware of the ideological positions they are reproducing, and in written discourse in which evaluative stance may be more consciously

constructed albeit covertly expressed, is a means of uncovering and examining dominant ideologies. It is now, of course, widely recognised in the literature (e.g. Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 1996, Eggins and Slade 1997, Channell 2003, Thompson and Zhou 2003, Martin and White 2005) that, as Hunston and Thompson state, ‘evaluation is a key linguistic concept’ (2003: 8) in the exploration of how ideologies are built up and absorbed over time into ways of talking about and looking at the world.

3.3.3 Applying Appraisal

Examining how the linguistic resources of evaluation are used in the conversational interviews conducted for this study clarifies understanding of the impact at a personal level of cultural attitudes towards ageing, particularly as they intersect with attitudes to gender. As analysis will show, the process of constructing a stance towards ageing is complex, given that ageing is at once an intensely personal and a culturally/institutionally appropriated phenomenon (see 2.1.1 above). Martin and White’s (2005) system of appraisal is an approach to discourse analysis which focuses on linguistic mechanisms of evaluation, providing a framework within which the wide and varied range of these linguistic resources can be systematically examined. Whilst initially developed as a framework for analysing written texts, Eggins and Slade’s (1997) work demonstrates that it can equally – and productively – be applied to spoken texts. Although this has proved a useful and relevant approach to the interview data, as with other analytic frameworks, I have not applied it rigidly, but have drawn on it as a one of a number of approaches.

As Stubbs argues (see above), Martin and White’s starting point, and also my own approach, is to view ‘all utterances [...] as in some way stanced or attitudinal’ (2005: 92). The following brief summary of the appraisal model demonstrates how this approach translates into a system of analysis of relevance to this study. The appraisal system is concerned with speaker/writer subjectivity as expressed through the linguistic resources used in the complex process of constructing a personal stance towards a given proposition; this involves language which construes degrees of alignment and distance, encodes approval/disapproval, and enables different – and differently graded – emotions to be communicated. It is also worth noting that the notion of ‘stance’ as employed by Martin and White and used in the context of

this study, can be understood in terms of Conrad and Biber's (1999) explanation:

the term 'stance' [is used] as a cover term for the expression of personal feelings and assessments in three major domains (1999: 57)

The domains identified by Conrad and Biber map onto Martin and White's categorisations (see below): epistemic stance (i.e. the un/certainty or reliability of a proposition); attitudinal stance (i.e. speaker feelings and judgements); and style stance (i.e. manner of expression).²⁸

Martin and White situate their system of appraisal within Halliday's model of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1978), Halliday and Matthiesson (2004) which theorises the notion of semantic choices which connect a text to 'the context of situation' (Halliday 1978: 139), conceptualising each sentence as a microcosm of the organisation of the semantic system which produces it. Halliday states that:

What is revealed in a single sentence, or other unit of lexicogrammatical structure, is its origin in the functional organization of the semantic system. ...A piece of wording – sentence, clause phrase or group – is the product of numerous micro-acts of semantic choice. (1978: 150)

Whilst Halliday's model, and its (by now well-documented) modes of meaning, or 'metafunctions' (1978, 1985, 2004: 29 and passim) is necessary background for understanding the detailed structure of the appraisal system, its principles are more directly relevant to the analysis of multimodal texts (see 3.3.4 below).

Martin and White structure their appraisal model in terms of three interrelated domains of meaning: **Attitude**, which deals with feelings, emotional reactions and judgements; **Engagement**, dealing with the construction of stance and attitudes; and **Graduation**, concerned with degrees of amplification of feelings. Each domain is further divided into more specialised sub-systems: e.g. **Attitude** is composed of three 'regions of feeling' (2005: 35): *Affect*, which describes resources for the expression of emotion; *Judgement*, dealing with moral assessments of behaviour (i.e. honesty, decorum); and *Appreciation*, which deals with aesthetic assessments (i.e. beauty). Each sub-system is realised by specific language features and forms the basis of a highly systemised linguistic map for the resources of evaluation; this has enabled me to analyse the interview data collected for this study systematically, and to identify and compare recurring patterns of language in order to achieve a detailed analytical

²⁸ In addition, Biber and Finegan's (1989) paper 'Styles of Stance in English: Lexical and grammatical marking of evidentiality and affect' provides detailed analysis on adjectival, verbal and modal stance markers.

basis for more nuanced interpretation. In this way it has been possible to distil varied and diverse expressions of evaluation in the data into a range of concrete categories of linguistic realisation; thus a given stretch of discourse within an individual account can be mapped according to semantic domain (i.e. **Attitude**) and further broken down for deeper analysis into sub-system (i.e. *Affect, Judgement, Appreciation*) and the classifications of language features which realise them. The detailed linguistic classifications applied to the interview data, based on Martin and White's sub-systems, have been shown in Appendix I, (see Tables 3-7) together with an example of the analytical grids created for each interview text (see Table 8), which illustrates how the linguistic analysis of **Attitude** has been applied to a continuous stretch of discourse and demonstrates how the analysis can access both a 'top-down' perspective (prosodic realisation) as well as a 'bottom-up' perspective (lexical realisation) (Martin and White 2005: 70). Looking at the prosody in a continuous stretch of discourse as Martin and White argue, has proved useful in identifying positive/negative linguistic patterning, enabling it to be analysed as a unit of meaning so that the cumulative effects of individual lexical realisations can be used in the analytical process. Thus the combination of top-down and bottom-up perspectives allows a more fine-grained level of analysis to be applied to each interview text, enabling patterns of meaning, as well as specific linguistic features, to be compared within and between texts.

3.3.4 Analysing multimodal texts

In creating datasets to explore the public discourses of ageing I have sought to represent different discourse genres²⁹ (e.g. advertisements, newspaper journalism, magazine articles, a television documentary), whilst acknowledging that the number of texts is severely limited by the scope of the study. Nonetheless, I have taken the view that there is enough of an analytical 'critical mass' to form a basis for more generalisable insights. These are all multimodal texts, combining different communicative modes (i.e. verbal, visual, auditory etc) in creating their message. Analysing such texts requires an approach which acknowledges their polysemic nature as Litosseliti (2013: 96) advises, and allows their different elements to be deconstructed systematically to understand their different roles in the creation of the message, so that the meaning rather than merely the effect of the communication can be

²⁹ van Leeuwen (2005) and Jeffries (2007) offer useful perspectives on genre which there is insufficient space to discuss fully here.

analysed with precision. This demands a system for analysis of individual semiotic modes in a text which also allows them to be interpreted in the context of the social structures which have generated them. What this means in the context of this study, to paraphrase Jeffries, is the capability to analyse the techniques used by advertisers/media corporations ‘in persuading women and girls to accept certain ideological constructions of their bodies’ (2007: 29), and in doing so, as Fairclough argues, to connect such ‘micro events’ to the ‘macro structures’ (2010: 38) of cultural attitudes to ageing.

I have drawn on van Leeuwen (1996) and Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) system of visual grammar in my analysis of these multimodal texts, setting it, as they do, within the theoretical framework of social semiotics (van Leeuwen 2005, Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), in order to examine how and why different semiotic modes are used in the production of what van Leeuwen terms ‘communicative artefacts’ (2005: 94), and to be able to interpret them within – and as a product of – a specific ‘context of situation’ (Halliday 1978: 139) and the power structures which define it. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that whoever has the power to control and regulate the use of semiotic resources (i.e. advertisers, media corporations) also has the means of controlling prevailing ideology. Their view is that images are expressions of ideology:

....we see images of whatever kind as entirely within the realm of the realisations and instantiations of ideology, as a means – always – for the articulation of ideological positions (2006: 14)

Thus their approach, which they describe as ‘reading between the lines of texts’ (ibid) is particularly relevant to my study as it provides a structure for analysing the role of different semiotic modes in constructing the ideological positions encoded in texts. They draw on and incorporate perspectives from two domains of linguistic development: critical linguistics and Halliday’s systemic-functional model of linguistics (see below). Van Leeuwen draws a parallel with developments in linguistics in which the focus has shifted from ‘sentence’ to ‘text’ and from ‘grammar’ to ‘discourse’ (2005: xi); in a similar way social semiotics has moved from a focus on the ‘sign’³⁰ to the notion of semiotic ‘resources’. In conceptualising their system of visual analysis as a ‘grammar of visual design’ (2006: 2) Kress and van

³⁰ The sign, as defined by the semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure (1972) is the result of the union between the signifier (i.e. an observable form such as colour) and the signified (i.e. the meaning which is signified, for example ‘tranquillity’)

Leeuwen apply Halliday's model of linguistic structures to other semiotic modes; indeed these parallels are a foundation for their thinking. Halliday defines grammar as 'a means of representing human experience' (1985: 101); grammatical rules are a means to this end rather than an end in itself. Similarly Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the way in which meanings can be expressed across different semiotic modes articulates wider cultural structures of meaning. In adapting Halliday's systemic-functional model of language to their system of visual analysis, Kress and van Leeuwen apply Halliday's metafunctions (see 3.3.3 above) to the analysis of visual compositions; Halliday's model identifies three modes of meaning or 'metafunctions' (1978, 1985, 2004) which are simultaneously present in all utterances: the textual, concerned with the flow of the discourse, and creating 'cohesion and unity' (Halliday and Matthiesson 2004: 30); the ideational, which construes human experience in terms of actions and events and who is enacting them; and the interpersonal, where social relations are negotiated and where, of particular relevance to this study, 'appraisal of and attitude towards whoever we are addressing and what we are talking about' (ibid: 29) are located. An example of the application of Kress and van Leeuwen's system of visual grammar to two multimodal texts analysed in this study has been included in Appendix 1 (see Table 9).

The system of visual grammar has proved a particularly relevant approach to the analysis of the texts in this dataset and I have applied it more directly than I have the other frameworks discussed above. As already noted, it allows precise and systematic analysis of different semiotic resources used in each text (i.e. compositional structure, visual modality, use of colour and typeface, depiction of the social actor) but at the same time confers freedom of interpretation of the cultural and ideological significance lying behind the semiotic choices. In conjunction with the system of visual analysis, I have drawn on Matheson's (2005) work on transitivity in the textual analysis of magazine articles and advertisements, which has allowed a more delicate analysis of the techniques used by writers and advertisers in positioning – even manoeuvring - the reader with regard to the authorial stance of a text through linguistic strategies such as use of imperative verb forms and inclusive pronouns. These themes are discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

The following four chapters focus on the data analysis, starting with analysis of the qualitative interview data – the private voices - in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 examines how

participants talk about and evaluate ageing as an abstract as well as an embodied phenomenon, and chapter 5 looks more specifically at the ageing appearance.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRIVATE VOICES (I): DISCOURSES OF AGEING

4.0 Introduction

The analytical focus of the current and following chapter is the qualitative data gathered from 19 face-to-face interviews, as described in chapter 3. This data provides a rich corpus of commentary on ageing, a necessary empirical perspective on the complex process of constructing, navigating and expressing gender and age identity in everyday life (see 2.1 and 2.3.1 above). Most significantly for the purposes of this study, this is an opportunity to examine in depth the language real people use to express their feelings about ageing as part of everyday lived experience. Together chapters 4 and 5 aim to show how close analysis of the language of these private voices has been used to address research questions (i) and (ii) as outlined in chapter 1: i.e. to explore how individual women evaluate their subjective experiences of ageing, the linguistic resources they call on, and whether/how public discourses influence the ways in which they talk about their experiences; and secondly to examine and interpret the insights gained from analysing their language in use. In order to explore the data from a top-down as well as a bottom-up perspective, as described in 3.3.3 above, the linguistic analysis in these two chapters draws on specific frameworks of analysis: CDA perspectives (see 3.3.1) to investigate the impact of public discourses on language at an individual level; and Martin and White's (2005) system of appraisal (see 3.3.3) to identify the complex resources of evaluation participants draw on in talking about their personal stance towards ageing. The analysis is divided into two parts: participants' discussion of ageing as a general phenomenon, an abstract entity and a physical process, which is the focus of the current chapter, and their feelings and experiences of the ageing appearance, explored in chapter 5. As outlined in chapter 3, the analysis focuses primarily on the mid-life cohort, although also draws on data from other age categories. Section 4.1 of this chapter examines the impact of institutional and cultural models of ageing on participants' language use; section 4.2 investigates ways in which participants deconstruct ageing into different domains, and how this affects linguistic resources of evaluation. Section 4.3 examines the intersection of age and gender identity through the subjective experiences of four female participants, and section 4.4 summarises principal observations arising from the analysis.

4.1 Ageing and the lifecourse

... you know we must make the most of our 20s 'cos it's all downhill from there ((laughs))
[F2-23]

I took out a photograph of when I was probably the age that I liked myself best at...27...I
would say that was the sort of optimum year physically [F13-56]

These extracts, from the accounts of two female participants at different points in the lifecourse, exemplify some commonalities in the ways in which participants evaluate the stages and transitions in their lives, and the impact they attribute to the ageing process. For F2-23 as she looks forward, what waits at the end of her 20s is 'all downhill' by comparison; similarly F13-56, looking back at being 27 describes it as 'the optimum year physically' with the implication that the intervening period of time has represented a falling away from that pinnacle. As analysis will demonstrate, there appears to be a reciprocal impact between how the process of ageing is evaluated and how progress through the lifecourse is interpreted, and individual stances appear to owe much of their linguistic construction and ideological foundation to institutional and cultural models of ageing (see 2.1.1 above).

Whilst it could be argued that cultural attitudes to ageing are shifting and that the cultural, linguistic and visual repertoire is becoming more flexible, it can also be argued that powerful cultural 'master narratives' (Gullette 1997: 8 and *passim*) continue to shape individual attitudes towards ageing, for example: the expectation of peak followed by decline, as the above extracts from F2-23 and F13-56 illustrate; the importance attributed to chronological age markers and 'decadism' (Coupland 2009: 960); the 'menopause discourse' (Gullette 1997:99); and ageing as a 'biomedical model of decline' (Hepworth 2003: 89). Furthermore, these cultural messages are enshrined in and disseminated by, public/mass-media discourses, as Twigg notes in her analysis of *Vogue*:

For magazines like *Vogue*, however, aging sets in early, starting at the point at which youth begins to fade, often regarded as the late twenties (2010: 473).

The language of the 20-something participants in the present study demonstrates the extent to

which these cultural and media messages have been absorbed:

... age is so positive and so like whorr when you're under 21 'cos you can't wait to be 18 and you can't wait to be 21 and as soon as you're 21 22 people make jokes about you being old.. [F2-23]

For F2-23, each transition moment, however brief, is regarded as significant, given meaning by the chronological age markers associated with it; thus 'you can't wait to be 18 and you can't wait to be 21' with the repeated use of 'can't wait' conveys her impatience to reach the perceived pinnacle of being 21, still considered to be the traditional gateway to maturity with its associations of independence and self-determination. However, her next clause already anticipates the decline which is assumed to follow the peak ('as soon as you're 21 22 people make jokes about you being old...'). Nonetheless, transition is evaluated positively at this point in the lifecourse; she continues

this is what I've always wanted to have you know to be sort of a bit more serious and to have all the things I want in my grasp like I feel at this stage I can do anything I want like I'm on the cusp I can see my future forming [F2-23]

Vocabulary choices, ('I'm **on the cusp**') and modals of possibility/capability ('I **can** do anything...') and the repeated use of the present ('I **can see** my future...') give a feeling of momentum to her speech patterns, anchoring her in the present moment whilst bringing a hypothetical future closer, making it concrete with the physicality of 'in **my grasp**'. Another participant in this age group, F1-21, echoes the sense of a pinnacle moment:

and then there's a small window of your 20s where you think you know I wish I could kind of stay this age forever... [F1-21]

Thus the linguistic construction of this pinnacle moment, observable across the accounts of all participants in this cohort, indicates an assumption, already taken for granted by the second decade, that the lifecourse is constructed around a (brief) peak which carries within it the inevitability of decline, expressed overtly ('it's all downhill from there' (see F2-23 above), or left implicit and unspoken as in F1-21's wish to 'kind of stay this age forever'.

The notion of peak and decline is also a powerful motif in the discourse of the female mid-life participants, although as this extract from a 49 year-old woman shows, the temporal perspective is retrospective rather than prospective:

I would say that my pinnacle was probably 10 years ago.... and I would say that 10 years on that's definitely waning [F10-49]

Here the decadal markers ('10 years ago...10 years on...') are used to construct the negative prosody which characterises the transition between the perceived pinnacle and the present moment, establishing a contrast between 'then' and 'now' which is implicitly characterised by loss and diminishment, expressed through the inherently negative 'waning'. The analysis of evaluations of the ageing appearance in chapter 5 suggests that for all female participants, and for the mid-lifers in particular, the concept of peak and decline is understood and interpreted most immediately in terms of physical appearance; however, for some mid-life participants, the menopause is an equally significant marker of decline, as this extract from the account of a 45 year-old woman illustrates:

... I'm conscious at some point my menstrual cycle will start to change I don't know when that will be.... but thinking about the menopause is quite horrific.... [F8-45]

F8-45 is asked why she regards the menopause as 'horrific':

... well that means that I'm no longer I am definitely middle aged basically I'm no longer able to produce children I've got this image of kind of shrivelling up and drying and you know drying up.... [F8-45]

What she dreads most about the onset of menopause is the loss of fertility; the lexical group she draws on to express her fear, ('drying up', 'shrivelling',) conveys at a literal level the loss of the bodily fluids related to fertility, and at a metaphorical level, the drying up of the forces which constitute her sense of self-identity (see Giddens 1991 and 2.2 above) and drive her sexual energy. It is significant that she still recalls how her father talked about the start of her menstrual cycle:

... I remember my dad saying to me when my periods started really embarrassing oh you're a woman now...[F8-45]

It is possible that the reason for the lingering resonance of his words is that they represented wider cultural attitudes which she still carries with her, so that as a mature woman, F8-45's interpretation is that if the start of menstruation symbolises her transition into womanhood then the end of her reproductive life marks a transition to something less than womanhood, indicated by her subsequent comment 'you therefore cease to become [sic] a woman'. This language suggests that her projection of life post-menopause is more complex than merely a phase of decline; in an unconscious exemplification of de Beauvoir's notion of 'a third sex' (1949, (1997): 63, see also 2.2.3 of this study), F8-45 calls into question the foundations on which her gendered identity is constructed, seeing herself consigned by culture and biology to the genderless, desexualised hinterland as described by de Beauvoir, 'not male [but] no

longer female' (ibid). For another mid-life female participant, the menopause also marks a transition to be dreaded – she refers to it as 'the menopause voice':

... up until a couple of months ago I was having regular periods and then when they did all the millions of tests I was having hot flushes and I said am I in the menopause ... and they said not even close.... but what I hated about it is I started to wonder ooh I feel a little uncomfortable now I wonder if that's menopause...[F11-54]

As with F8-45, F11-54 also evaluates the menopause through powerful negative prosody expressed through choice of lexis ('hated', 'uncomfortable'), but her anxiety has a different origin:

I just it goes back to living every day at 120% I don't want to feel lousy y'know I refuse to accept as the norm like I'm a little tired.... so I don't think it's loss of fertility it's I don't want to feel bad and I want to have a healthy sex life for a long time... [F11-54]

F11-54 fears the loss of physical and sexual energy ('I don't want to feel bad and I want to have a healthy sex life for a long time'), more than loss of her reproductive ability. The commonality of attitude in both women's negative evaluations of the menopause can be tracked back to the menopause discourses disseminated in mass-media communication, which perpetuate wider cultural narratives of menopause-as-illness/decline (see Greer 1991, Gullette 1997 and 2.2.4 and 7.1.3 of this study)³¹. The dominance of such menopause commentary, which Gullette terms the 'menoboom' (1997: 98) leads these women to view it as a physical and an emotional phenomenon, a profoundly significant transition marker signalling the start of a lifestage defined by loss: of youthfulness, energy, fertility, sexuality and femininity. The force and intensity of the negative language both women use is notable; Martin and White categorise such up-and down-scaling of language as 'graduation' (2005: 135 and passim), describing the semantics of graduation as 'central to the appraisal system' (ibid) (see further in Appendix 1 of this study). The powerful negative language used in this particular context indicates the influence of cultural problematisation of the menopause, and that counter-discourses which attempt to construct post-menopause more positively, i.e. as a time of liberation and tranquility (see Greer 1991, see also chapter 7 of this study), have yet to make any impact on their perceptions. Lexical realisations of temporal comparison between 'then' and 'now' which feature in the accounts of many female mid-life participants, set up a narrative in which 'now' is characterised as a decline, a falling away of attractiveness

³¹ Chapter 7 of this present study analyses how the menopause is presented and evaluated in media discourses.

in comparison with a younger, other self. In this way, as discussed above, the impact of the public discourses of ageing can be observed in the language of these private voices.

For participants aged 75 and over, bodily changes are markers of transition which are often experienced symbolically as much as physically, as this comment from a 75 year-old female participant illustrates:

... I think it [sc. transition into old age] happened when I was 60 because that's when I started having real problems with arthritis... and I thought huh god this is it the beginning of old age... that was a bit of a watershed for me a deterioration in health... [F15-75]

F15-75's words exemplify the prevailing decline narrative in which, as Gullette (1997) argues, the "normal" decline of the body is pathologised (see 2.3.3 above). In a complex stretch of discourse, F15-75 makes a causal link, expressed through her choice of 'because', between the onset of arthritis and the onset of old age ('it happened when I was 60 **because** that's when I started having real problems with arthritis...'); in doing so she subscribes to dominant cultural attitudes to ageing which conflate the language of ageing with the discourse of illness (see 2.3.3 above and footnote 22). For F15-75, ageing and illness are experienced as synonymous in that they both lead her to an unwelcome 'watershed' in terms of her self-perception, heralding the beginning of a new life stage ('...the beginning of old age.... that was a bit of a **watershed** for me a deterioration in health'). At the same time however, F15-75's choice of language suggests that ageing is unlike illness in that that she perceives it to be inevitable ('this is it'). Twigg writes that

'... the Fourth Age can seem to be not just about the body, but nothing but the body. It dominates subjective experience, to the extent that it swamps all other factors in determining matters like morale or wellbeing' (2003: 64).

The dominance of the body as the expression of identity and the importance of its physical changes as transition markers from one lifestage to another mean that in this phase of life the body takes on a further significance, as a signifier of what has been lost, not only physically, but also in terms of relevance and community, as illustrated by an 80 year-old participant:

... and then my walking went and it was almost as though my whole social life had finished...[F16-80]

The perspectives of these fourth age participants are strongly retrospective, indicated by frequent use of the simple past, and verbal constructions such as 'used to' which evoke past phases in their lives with a sense of finality, as completed chapters in the lifecourse. This suggests that for them the present is defined by the past not the future, and that having made

the final transition into deep old age, what remains is a series of present moments, based on a retrospective sense of self-identity, which is now felt to be under threat of submersion by the physical changes of ageing.

Exploring how participants perceive and evaluate transition suggests that what Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema refer to as ‘identity projects’ become more uncertain over time, because of the effects of time, particularly on the embodied self. Such ‘identity trouble’ (Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema 2008: 1, see also 2.3 of this study) appears to be a feature common to the experience of the mid-life participants in particular in that they inhabit a lifestage somewhat uneasily located between the phases of youth and age. ‘The new middle age’ as conceptualised by Featherstone and Hepworth (1988: 384, see also 2.1.1 of this study) and also represented in more contemporary media discourses (see chapter 7), becomes an extended, fluidly defined period in the lifecourse; however it could be argued that even a redefined mid-life has been appropriated by contemporary culture through pervasive discourses of body improvement which themselves encode ageist ideologies. Thus mid-lifers are positioned, in their own and society’s perception, as being no longer young but not yet old, and confronted with the complex task of identity construction, rendered more so by the conflicting demands of cultural expectation.

4.1.1 Identity and uncertainty in mid-life

... 55 gosh it’s not that y’know it’s not that far away I’m petrified of ageing actually petrified yeah just because my children are so young y’know... I’d hope that I’d be able to keep myself fit and healthy and dress well and that perhaps it would matter slightly less that I would be one of those Helen Mirren women that y’know exudes personality...or the personality would kind of mask the age... [F8-45]

The complex linguistic work involved in constructing age identity in mid-life is examined through the accounts of 4 mid-lifers (3 female, 1 male). The above extract, from a 45 year-old female participant, shows the extent to which cultural ‘master narratives’ (Gullette 1997: 9) concerning ageing and mid-life, as explored in chapter 2, have shaped the language she uses to express her attitudes towards her own ageing. Her evaluations illustrate the complex relationships Fairclough observes between the ‘micro events’ of individual talk and ‘macro structures’ of cultural attitudes (2010: 38, see also 3.3.1 of this study), and at the level of the language, exemplify Halliday’s (1978) contention that a single sentence can be viewed as a

microcosm of the wider semantic structure which produces it (see 3.3.3 of this study). The relatively brief stretch of discourse from F8-45 contains many of the themes already discussed in chapter 2: the significance of the decade as a measure of cultural expectation as well as a personal marker of time; an attitude to ageing based on fear and the need to resist and disguise its visible signs; the notion of the body as the object of continued investment (see Shilling 2003); and the uncertainty of self-identity as an ageing woman. F8-45 frames her evaluation of the next stage of her life in terms of its chronological marker, ('55 gosh it's not that...not that far away'), instinctively alighting on a point ten years on from her current age and in doing so exemplifying, as Coupland argues, the 'new ideological associations between time, ageing, the body and personal identity projects' (2009: 953). The decade – and to an extent time itself – has been appropriated by consumer and mass-media discourses (see 7.1.2 of this study); F8-45 instinctively subscribes to the 'mythic status' (ibid: 960) of the decade as a measure not merely of chronological time but, as Coupland suggests, of cultural expectations and requirements of the ageing female body. Therefore as she contemplates being 55, F8-45's expression of surprise at its proximity carries a sense of dismay which is immediately explained – and reinforced - by the powerfully negative articulation of her feelings about ageing ('I'm **petrified** of ageing actually **petrified** yeah'). The semantic force of her choice of 'petrified' and her repetition of it, indicate both strength of feeling and as Martin and White (2005) observe, the degree of her investment in the attitude she is expressing. 'Petrified' imbues this response with something greater than fear; this is the 'catastrophe' of ageing described by Woodward (1991: 8) which still appears to have resonance in the current cultural environment, as chapter 7 discusses more fully.

The clauses immediately following show the influence of cultural discourses of body maintenance and improvement, in that F8-45 discursively frames her continued investment in her appearance as a "solution" to the problem of ageing ('I'd hope that I'd be able to keep myself fit and healthy and dress well and that perhaps it would matter slightly less...'); her use of tentative forms ('I'd hope', '**perhaps**.....**slightly** less...') indicate the hypothetical nature of her reflections, but in the context of this stretch of discourse, may also reference her uncertainty.³² Her final comment, again located between tentative hope and speculation, is

³² Such modulations, as both Palmer (1979) and Martin and White (2005) argue, often fulfil more than one function in discourse, offering an opportunity for more delicate analysis of individual stance.

particularly telling, ('...or the personality would kind of mask the age...'); her choice of 'mask', with all that it symbolises, recalls Featherstone and Hepworth's complex metaphor of the 'mask of ageing' (1988: 371, see also 2.3.4 of this study), in which ageing is conceptualised as a mask which conceals the "real" identity of the person beneath. Not only that, but F8-45's hope that her personality will mask the signs of age can be more deeply understood in the context of Woodward's development of the notion of the mask, in which she

call[s] into question the unequivocal notion of the mask as "mere outward show" that hides a "truth". A mask may *express* rather than hide a truth. The mask *itself* may be one of multiple truths (1991: 148).

This conceptualisation of the mask incorporates the concept of 'masquerade' (1991:147 -165) which she explains in terms of the strategies governing self-representation, which can be both physical (i.e. covering grey hair, cosmetic surgery) as well as behavioural, but which are bound up in the complex performance of gender and age identity. She states that

in a culture which so devalues age, masquerade with respect to the ageing body is first and foremost a denial of age, an effort to erase or efface age and to put on youth (1991: 148).

These are the discourses which, on a deeply personal level, influence F8-45's attitudes to her own ageing, and which provide the linguistic framework for her self-evaluation. The cultural mirror (see 5.2.1 below) reflects back an age identity based on fear of ageing and the need 'to efface age and to put on youth', and may even determine her choice of role model ('I would be one of those Helen Mirren women...'); Mirren is widely represented in mass-media discourses as a culturally-approved, uncontested role model of ageing femininity, even though her beauty may place her, along with younger role models, firmly in the domain of unachievable aspiration for most ageing women.

Other female mid-life participants also express through their language use the uncertainty of their identity projects. This 49 year-old participant's speech style is characterised by its contradictory and conflicting nature:

... but I think there is this feeling about as a woman of a certain age you almost get to the point where you just need to start lying about your age...[F10-49]

... I would say that's successful ageing too it's to do with because she [sc. image of "ordinary" elderly woman] looks happy it's to do I mean I think that's about I mean again it's about acceptance...[F10-49]

... I'd do anything frankly yeah no I would definitely if I felt because I mean it's back to pressure on [sic] society because you want to look good to um feel good in yourself so I think physical appearance is very important [F10-49]

... I feel a relief because I do feel that I have an opportunity to be taken a bit more seriously and that actually I don't have to look so damn fantastic all the time because I can say I am of a certain age...[F10-49]

When viewed together, these extracts, taken from different points in her account, provide an insight into the complex, multidimensional nature of an individual response to ageing within the conditions of the current cultural environment, which is by no means untypical for the participants in this study. In F10-49's case the somewhat extreme nature of the contradictions in her attitudinal stance, which extends from a doctrine of generalised acceptance to a personal undertaking to 'do anything frankly' in order to conform at a personal level to external standards of appearance, may possibly be heightened by the impending chronological marker of her 50th birthday. Nonetheless, the linguistic resources she uses to construct her attitudinal stance (i.e. upscaled language, modals of obligation, pronoun shifts, adverbial stance markers) express a conflict between the different dimensions of identity as theorised by Iedema (2008) (see also 2.3.1 of this study): the private voice of the subjective identity and the outward-facing self of the projected identity must somehow be accommodated, together with a third component suggested by the analysis undertaken in this study, that of the received identity, i.e. which is imposed on individuals by the expectations contained within cultural discourses of ageing and appearance. F10-49's account exemplifies the tension between these different components of identity, and the 'identity trouble' which results. Thus she builds her projected identity around the notion of acceptance based on a confidence which comes with being 'of a certain age', and which brings with it a liberation from the tyranny of appearance ('I don't have to look so damn fantastic all the time'). At the same time, however, the voice of her received identity acknowledges the importance of appearance ('I think physical appearance is very important') and, significantly, her subjective self expresses a deeply held desire to conform to those same external standards by mounting a fierce resistance to the visible signs of ageing which at a more subliminal level of selfhood she seeks to deny altogether ('you almost get to the point where you just need to start lying about your age'). Her justification, ('you want to look good um to feel good in yourself') is also an attempt to reconcile the contradictions in her attitudes both to herself and also, through her pronoun choice of 'you' rather than 'I', to an imagined 'gaze of the Other'

(Bartky 1990: 27); the switch from the direct ownership of ‘I’ may be a means of locating her stance within an imagined wider community of similar views. Thus F10-49 expresses the uncertainty of her personal identity project in profoundly conflicting articulations of acceptance and denial of ageing, in which she appears both to resist and desire conformity to cultural standards of appearance. These contradictions give an insight into the fragile nature of self-identity when confronted with the threat of ageing (see 2.3 above). Giddens characterises self-identity as ‘both robust and fragile’ (1991: 55), arguing that maintaining a coherent ‘story of the self’ (ibid) amongst many other possible stories makes self-identity an inherently fragile entity which, he suggests, is nonetheless sufficiently robust to withstand ‘major tensions or transitions in the social environments within which the person moves’ (ibid). However, the experience of F10-49 and other female mid-life participants, caught in the culturally and discursively uncertain territory of ageing youthfulness/youthful ageing, suggests that their self-identity is more defined by fragility than robustness.

F13-56, another mid-life woman, describes a literal experience of this ontological uncertainty; she is one of a very few older women in a young workforce, in a company which targets young aspirational female consumers:

... and what’s a bit what I feel is a bit awkward is that they’re all emailing round ‘cos they’re going to go out for a drink or do something or other and I think they think oh should we include her or not and then I think should I go or not and I know I won’t enjoy it either...
[F13-56]

F13-56’s ambivalence about the social hinterland she feels that she inhabits is indicated by the negative prosody of her account, expressed through an accumulation of language features such as lexical choices and pronoun shifts. She uses negatively evaluative lexis (‘a bit **awkward**’), which, although the minimising ‘a bit’ softens the intensity of her evaluation, in the narrative which follows suggests that at a deeper level she too is experiencing tensions between the different dimensions of her identity. These become apparent in complex pronoun shifts which characterise this stretch of discourse, (‘**I** think **they** think oh should **we** include **her**’). She uses the shift from ‘I think’ to ‘they think’ to position herself (temporarily) as the gaze of youth on her own projected identity as an older woman; the inherent negative judgement she anticipates is expressed in the depersonalised ‘her’, and the juxtaposition with the inclusive ‘we’ is indicative at a micro level, of the wider cultural polarisation of youth and age (see 2.1.1 above) in which the older woman is designated as “other” by the collective

fear of ageing. F13-56's uncertainty about whether to align herself with youth or older age ('and then I think should I go or not') is articulated with the voice of her subjective identity: the ownership of 'I' and the mental process verb 'think' locate this as an inner debate; the modal 'should' indicates her sense of social obligation which the same private voice then dismisses, ('...and I know I won't enjoy it either...'). The use of 'either' at the end of this stretch of discourse encodes her assumption that neither "they" nor she would find the social contact agreeable; this can be seen as another signal, deeply embedded in the evaluative structure of the language, of the extent to which the binaries of youth and age are perpetuated at the level of individual language practice.

The experience of these female mid-lifers can be compared with that of one of the mid-life men:

... I was not very confident as a younger man being a quiet kid ... I think over the years I've matured and I've flourished if you like and enjoyed it almost I still don't like being in the limelight too much but it's nice to know that if needed I can be confident... [M19-53]

... I'm more than happy with where I am now but I guess when I was 36... but I'm more than comfortable now because I'm a lot happier with things than I was when I was 36... [M19-53]

In contrast with the women, M19-53's account is characterised by a positive prosody based on the language of confidence and certainty, expressed through positively evaluative verbs ('matured', 'flourished' 'enjoyed'), and reinforced by intensification ('more than happy'; 'a lot happier'). There is no suggestion of the 'identity trouble' which seems to characterise the accounts of his female counterparts, rather there is a sense that the different dimensions of M19-53's identity are working in harmony. This is illustrated by a comment elsewhere in his account where he describes his love of clothes:

... I think this is what I want to wear and I don't really care too much what people think I've got some pink trousers... I've got red cords and I love it... [M19-53]

Vocabulary and verb constructions suggest that his attitudinal stance to this present phase in his life is one of assurance; by emphasising the colour of his trousers ('I've got some **pink** trousers'... 'I've got **red** cords') he signals awareness that his projected identity contains an element of flamboyance which might be construed as transgressing against conventions typifying male dress codes (e.g. subdued/dark colours), and therefore likely to elicit disapproval from unspecified external voices, only to dismiss these hypothetical negative judgements ('I don't really care too much what people think'). His confidence is further

indicated by unhedged verbs of positive affect, ('this is **what I want to wear**', '**I love it**'). Perhaps an even more significant contrast with the accounts of the female participants of all ages is that rather than subscribing to the perception of the lifecourse as structured by an aesthetic pinnacle followed by inevitable decline, M19-53 uses the temporal contrast between "then" and "now" to conceptualise his life as a steady progression, ('I'm a lot happier with things than I was when I was 36') expressed through metaphors of growth and development ('I've matured and I've flourished').

It would be over-simplistic and unjustifiable on such a small evidential base to suggest that constructing age identity is unproblematic for men; indeed academic enquiry into male ageing (see Gullette 1997, Featherstone and Hepworth 1998b) and more recently, a growing amount of commentary on this issue in the mass-media indicates a wider acknowledgement that the process of ageing may be becoming increasingly problematic for men and that concern with appearance is starting younger– particularly for the so-called 'Generation Y'³³. Nevertheless, it could be argued that analysis undertaken in this study of the nature and extent of the differences in the way ageing is experienced by men versus women contributes to a more generalisable observation, that the evaluative framework within which men construct age identity remains less rigorously policed than that of women. It could also be argued that whilst mid-life in the current cultural environment may be less dependent on 'chronological bonds' as Featherstone and Hepworth (1988: 385) suggest, it is if anything more subject to the imposition of cultural judgements and expectations than traditional conceptualisations of middle age; this is particularly true for female participants in this study whose accounts show the difficulty and uncertainty they experience in constructing age identity in the context of the youth-oriented discourses which define the new middle age, as the analysis of media discourses in chapter 7 illustrates.

4.2 Articulations of ageing

... I mean the theme underneath all this is a vibrant healthy life.... [F11-54]

... becoming incapacitated and having to rely on others which I really don't look forward to [F12-56]

³³ Generation Y is defined as 'the generation born in the 1980s and 1990s, comprising primarily the children of the baby boomers' (source: Wikipedia).

... I'm conscious more than anything else probably through my eyesight of the ageing process ...[M18-44]

I mean mentally you're about the same but physically you're not and I don't like that... [F16-80]

Chapter 2 discussed the complex, multi-dimensional nature of individual responses to ageing, and considered the gap in understanding, identified by a growing number of scholars working in the fields of age and identity theory, which exists between theorisations of ageing and empirical perspectives. This section focuses on how participants articulate their personal responses to the process of ageing, examining the language they use to describe and evaluate their experiences. As elsewhere, the focus is primarily on the female participants in the study, though some male perspectives are included for comparative purposes.

Hepworth describes the process of ageing as 'at once a universal, 'diverse' and yet 'vague' human condition' (2003: 92, see also 2.3.4 of this study). The extracts above illustrate the complex, non-unitary nature of individual responses to ageing, showing how participants use language to deconstruct the amorphous nature of ageing in a way which allows them to establish an evaluative stance on its particular dimensions. For example, the language choices of F11-54 and F12-56 express two polarised views of old age: F11-54's aspiration of 'a vibrant healthy life', expressed through upscaled positive adjectives contrasts with F12-56's apprehensive projection of old age based around her fear of 'becoming incapacitated'. M18-44's verb choice ('I'm conscious') indicates the self-surveillance which drives him to interpret the deterioration in his eyesight as a transition marker of ageing, whilst F16-80 expresses a theme common to many participants, explored in section 4.2.4 below, that the process of ageing is perceived to threaten the unity of the inner and outer self ('...mentally you're about the same but physically you're not'). Examining such linguistic resources provides insights into how participants evaluate different dimensions of ageing differently, using complex shifts in their evaluative lens, from a depersonalised stance on ageing as a general phenomenon to the intensely personal nature of their own ageing. Chapter 2 also discussed the imposition of cultural models of ageing on individual experience. In particular the culturally constructed notion of successful ageing (see Grenier 2012) appears to influence how participants interpret successful ageing in terms of their own experience, using it as a

reference point for individual aspiration and a means of delineating the territory of what is perceived as the opposite state - unsuccessful or problematic ageing, as will become evident in the following section.

4.2.1 Conflicting models of ageing: ‘the unrelenting body’ versus the decrepit body

Reflecting on what constitutes successful ageing seems to be an important issue for participants across most age categories, but particularly for the mid-life cohort, perhaps given the fluid and transitional status of the mid-life, (see 4.1.1 above) in which the desire for attitudinal distance from old(er) age must be balanced with its increasing physical and temporal proximity. Participants often use linguistic evaluations of role models as a means of making the abstract notion of successful ageing more concrete. This is exemplified in the following extracts from two female mid-life participants:

... the fact that she’s (sc. mother) so active because I think keeping active keeps you young keep your brain active keep your body active that’ll keep you young she’s a very positive role model...[F8-45]

... look at what she’s [sc. Jane Fonda] done with her hair look at how beautiful her eyes still are what the hell has she done to still have her neck looking like that but for me that would be a positive a positive role model and y’know she’s probably still physically active.... and I mean the theme underneath all this is a vibrant healthy life...[F11-54]

The way F8-45 and F11-54 evaluate their respective role models reveals their own attitudinal stance on ageing. Thus F8-45’s repeated use of ‘active’ emphasises the importance she places on the notion of activity as a component in her evaluations of what constitutes a successful role model (‘she’s **so active...keeping active...keep your brain active...**). By juxtaposing ‘active’ and ‘young’ throughout this stretch of discourse she makes it clear that her positive evaluation of ‘keeping active’ is because she sees activity as synonymous with the values of youth, a means of maintaining the connection of the inner self and outer body (see 4.2.4 below), so if successful ageing is contingent on activity, the implicit message contained within her linguistic choices suggests that it is also contingent on maintaining an alignment with youthfulness. Her repetition of ‘keep’ (‘**keep** your brain active **keep** your body active’), poised semantically between an imperative and a quasi-conditional, combined with the second person pronoun, appears almost evangelical, recalling certain language features which typify the techniques used by procedural texts to appellate readers in order to instruct/advise them (see chapter 7). F8-45 goes on to describe her parents, aged in their 60s and 70s, in

terms which exemplify Grenier's notion of the culturally constructed 'unrelenting body' (2012: 92):

... my dad **built** a big barn this year and he's got 2 **tractors** mum got a **quad bike** for her 60th.... y'know **they're out there mulching out** the stables...[F8-45]

Verbs such as 'built', 'mulching out' and nouns ('tractors', 'quad bike') create a positive prosody based on ceaseless activity and productivity which according to Grenier is 'embedded in success-based models of transition in late life' (ibid). The approving way in which F8-45 recounts her parents' activities as if reading from a list of achievements suggests that she has absorbed this model of successful ageing into the infrastructure of her own aspirations.

Chapter 5 discusses the extent to which evaluations of appearance are inseparable from evaluations of ageing; F11-54's evaluation of Jane Fonda illustrates this. Her judgement of Fonda - now in her 70s - is framed in terms of appearance ('look at how beautiful her eyes still are'), but underpinned by the notion of the active body as the foundation on which everything else is built ('she's probably still physically active.... the **theme underneath all this** is a vibrant healthy life'). F11-54's repeated use of the qualifying still ('how beautiful her eyes **still** are.... **still** to have her neck looking like that...') is interesting as a linguistic signal of the ambivalence which underlies collective expectations about ageing, particularly as these intersect with gender, suggesting that the positive evaluation is made in spite of Fonda's age, that beauty and apparent physical fitness are somehow unexpected attributes in a 70 year-old. It could be argued that such subtle linguistic cues show the impact of the contradictory nature of cultural discourses of ageing in which the requirement to age successfully, built around notions of 'activity, success, productivity, health and leisure' as Grenier states (2012: 90), sits alongside the equally dominant cultural model of age-as-decline (see chapter 2), based on an expectation of the aesthetic and physical failure of the body. As Grenier further argues:

the challenge at this stage is in considering the extent to which the pendulum of dominant discourse has swung from one extreme focused on dependency to the other in its overemphasis on success and productivity (2012: 90)

When participants talk about personal aspirations for their old age, the notion of activity can be invested with a deeper significance than the merely physical, as illustrated by a 48 year-

old female participant:

... I think **being fit** I'm not that fit but you know being **able to run for the bus**.... I'm not ready to have a twinset and purple rinse and any of that **I want to run my company** for 10 years and then **I want to have enough energy** if our kiddies have babies when we did...

[F9-48]

Here F9-48 constructs activity in terms of physical fitness ('being able to run for the bus'), but also as kind of fitness for purpose ('I want to run my company for 10 years'), signifying her desire for continuing agency and control and therefore power and status. Her desire 'to be able to run for the bus' and 'to run my company' are connected by more than just choice of verb. Other participants' articulations of their aspirations about age/ing are similarly based on interpretations of activity as an indicator of success, an enabler of self-fulfilment, engagement and achievement, encompassing intellectual and emotional as well as physical domains, as illustrated by a 49-year-old woman:

... I think going forward I would aspire to the women that I have met who are **intellectually interesting** and **actively involved** active I mean I am very **inspired** by people who are **active in every sense**...[F10-49]

The influence of these contradictory models of ageing, produced by the cultural polarisation of youth and age (see 2.1.2 above) can be directly tracked in participants' language; thus conceptualisations of successful ageing, which conflate the notion of activity with the language of youthfulness and its attributes, (i.e. fitness, energy, engagement, relevance and agency), coexist in their narratives with discourses of problematic ageing, articulated through the language of fear and anxiety, which conflate ageing with illness. This is exemplified in the following extracts:

... there's a bit of me that's **scared I don't want to get old** none of us do...[F7-44]

... **fear of dying** before you've achieved your full potential... and personally that's the **fear of growing old** um fear that as you get older there are more **health risks** and some of those health risks may **limit** what one can do...[F7-44]

... I do have a **fear of decrepitude**.... **ill health** and I have particularly in my (xxxx) on my own a **fear of loneliness**.... my mother died not long ago and my father's not in very good condition at the moment and I don't really wish that on anybody it gets you in the end...[F10-49]

... becoming **incapacitated** and having to rely on others which **I really don't look forward to** or like having looked after Pa I don't like the thought of that....do I worry about it no because inevitably it happens to all of us no but that does **slightly concern** me if you ask me the question...[F12-56]

Intensely personal fears are expressed through common linguistic features: the language of negative emotion, coalescing around the word ‘fear’ (‘a bit of me that’s scared’, ‘fear of dying’, ‘my biggest fear’), generally expressed in unhedged phrases which emphasise the intensity of the feelings involved; pronoun shifts signifying the complex positioning work being undertaken as participants seek both to achieve distance from their fears and anxieties but also suggest community and shared experience. The complex system of linguistic resources used to make such shifts in alignment/disalignment are categorised by Martin and White under the heading of ‘engagement’ (2005: passim) and are central to understanding how speakers position themselves – engage with - a particular utterance, and with other viewpoints which might be in play (see chapter 3 of this study, also Appendix 1). Thus for example, F7-44 moves from direct ownership of her fear of ageing signified by the personal pronoun, (‘there’s a bit of **me** that’s scared’) to the more widely inclusive ‘us’ (‘none of **us** do’) by which she seeks to position herself as part of a wider community of experience. F7-44’s acknowledgement of/alignment with a shared system of belief is understood in Martin and White’s system as a heteroglossic perspective (2005: 92)³⁴ and is of relevance to the analysis undertaken here in that allows a deeper understanding of the complex manoeuvring involved in constructing an attitudinal stance. In her second extract, in which she talks more specifically about death, F7-44 uses the second person pronoun to create distance between the self and a proposition presumably too difficult to own in a more personal way (‘fear of dying before **you’ve** achieved **your** full potential’). She then moves from the distance of ‘you’ to the more disengaged ‘one’, (‘some of those health risks may limit what **one** can do’). As F7-44 shows herself elsewhere in her account to be extremely health and fitness conscious, this language feature could also signify a belief that the health risks she references do not apply to her.

In the extract from F10-49’s account, she describes her personal feelings about ageing as a combination of social/emotional anxieties (‘a fear of loneliness’) and physical concerns, expressed by the strongly negative ‘decrepitude’ which also suggests a sense of pathological rather than merely “normal” decline (see 2.3.3 above). Indeed, her description of her elderly father’s situation, (‘my father’s not in very good condition at the moment and I don’t really

³⁴ Martin and White’s use of heteroglossia in their system is based on Bakhtin’s (1981) work on dialogism and heteroglossia.

wish that on anybody’), which she offers by way of exemplification, reinforces the parallel she perceives between ageing and illness, as discussed in section 4.1 above. Her final comment, ‘it gets you in the end’ is ambiguous in that it is unclear whether ‘it’ refers to ageing or to illness, however, the ambiguity further reinforces the conflation of these two discourses; her comment accesses a collective bank of language commonly used to talk about serious illnesses such as cancer which are characterised in this way as the enemy, as if preying on the human body (similar findings are observed by Charteris-Black and Seale in their (2010) work on the language of illness). There is little sense in F10-49’s account of ageing as a natural process which will eventually – naturally - claim the body. Rather it is seen as an act of imposition, even predation, which must be resisted, as the following extracts from other participants also illustrate:

... but I would **hope** that I’m in better condition [sc. than father] **hopefully warding off**
[M19-53]

... I **hope** that if you carry on exercising and **hopefully** you can **stave off** some of this muscle loss...[M18-44]

The tentative language in these two extracts (‘I would **hope**’, ‘**hopefully** you can stave off’) indicates the fragile nature of the desire, shared by both M19-53 and M18-44, that age, like illness can be ‘warded off’ by the preventative measures they are taking.

Thus participants talk about age/ing and illness using a common vocabulary based on anxiety and fear of disempowerment (see also 4.2.3 below), but there is a paradox surrounding the ways in which they relate age and illness. If age is like illness it can be resisted, ‘warded off’, even cured through acts of agency such as cosmetic surgery and medical interventions; but if age is *unlike* illness, despite those efforts it is a kind of imposition upon the body which ultimately cannot be resisted. This, it could be argued, is one of the underlying irreconcilable and troubling conflicts experienced by these participants which shapes their perceptions of ageing and specifically of old age as a lifestage which is ‘sequestered’ (Giddens 1991:149) from the rest of the lifecourse (see also Grenier 2012, and 2.3.1 of this study), as the following extracts illustrate:

... you can have a completely healthy life y’know up until you’re 80 and then boy do **things start falling apart**...[F11-54]

... my parents are old but they're **still very active** so **I don't consider they're in old age** so for me **old age is** probably when you're **not capable** of doing obviously **not capable** when you stop driving.... [F8-45]

Both F11-54 and F8-45 describe a perceptual threshold which exists between the phase of life before old age sets in, characterised by health and activity, and the phase which follows this notional transition moment, defined by decrepitude and disempowerment. Thus F11-54's account juxtaposes 'a **completely healthy** life' with the state when 'things start **falling apart**', separated by the chronological marker of 80, in which the sense is clearly one of "before" and "after". Similarly F8-45 describes the phase before old age in terms of personal agency and activity ('my parents are old but they're **still very active** so I don't consider they're **in** old age'). Interestingly, the preposition 'in', although used in a temporal sense, is a (widely-used) spatial metaphor which in this context semantically reinforces the sense of concrete separation, as if it is possible to be outside old age before being forced into its space, from which, by implication, there is no exit. For F8-45 the passage into the space of old age turns on the notion of 'capability', with its associations of ability and active agency, symbolised by the ability to drive, which, when it is no longer possible, signifies the end of one lifestage and the start of another, defined by lack and loss ('...when you're **not capable** of doing **obviously not capable**'). This sense of separation seems also to be felt by participants who are themselves 'in' old age as this extract from an 80 year-old woman illustrates:

... I used to do an awful lot of walking... but unfortunately last year ... I was struck down with arthritis and I can't walk like I used to I can't do anything and y'know it's almost as though there was a good group we used to go socialising... but now I find p'raps it's just because I can't walk I'm sort of (.) y'know I don't know.... but I don't know how they view me... [F16-80]

Her narrative is characterised by negative comparison between the active engagement of "before", reinforced by the implicit regret of 'used to', ('**I used to do** an awful lot of walking'), and the present moment, defined by the negation of those earlier activities, ('**I can't walk**', '**I can't** do anything'). Her sense of isolation, of literally being pushed to one side as a result of her physical constraints, is implicit in her use of 'because' to denote cause and effect, ('p'raps it's just **because** I can't walk I'm sort of (.) but I don't know how they view me'). Tellingly, she allows her sentence to tail off uncompleted, ('...I'm sort of (.)'), as

if indicating her reluctance or inability to supply the word which might fill the linguistic and emotional void.

4.2.2 Depersonalisation: ageing as metaphor

As shown in the discussion above, complex shifts in alignment structure participants' responses to powerful and conflicting cultural models of ageing. Another manifestation of the positioning work participants undertake with regard to ageing is their use of metaphorical language as a mechanism for achieving emotional distance from the reality of ageing. Participants commonly talk about age and ageing as abstract concepts rather than as a personal phenomenon, as illustrated by an extract from the account of a 44 year-old male participant:

... I was conscious that there would come a time... when the company were probably going to say we probably need some fresh thinking and you're more associated with the **old world** than the **new world**...[M18-44]

The context for his comment is his current professional situation; having recently been made redundant he is, somewhat unexpectedly in his mid-40s, facing the prospect of job-hunting in an industry which traditionally favours the young. His choice of metaphorical expressions ('old world', 'new world') to characterise and contrast age and youth as abstract entities may therefore function as a distancing strategy, allowing him to depersonalise a situation which would be difficult at a personal level; locating the reality of ageing at a linguistic distance effectively places the current situation beyond his control as an individual. A 44 year-old female participant also talks about youth and age as abstract entities, but uses the metaphorical device of personification:

... youth brings new thinking youth connects them [sc. companies] to potentially new markets.... youth you can buy it cheap you can train it you can pay it more over time...[F7-44]

... I think age almost potentially brings baggage...[F7-44]

F7-44 uses metaphor to make complex shifts in alignment/disalignment with the viewpoint she is advancing: as she is discussing youth and age in the context of her professional experience, her strategy of talking in more abstract terms allows her to render a personal opinion as a general truth; her use of personification supports this, paradoxically, in allowing her both to talk in a dispassionate way about age and youth whilst essentialising and encapsulating the different characteristics of both, so youth is 'new thinking' and 'cheap',

whilst age ‘brings baggage’. Thus she uses language to position the abstract states of youth and age as commodities which can be commercialised – or not, whilst allowing the underlying expression of her own attitudes, present in judgement loaded phrases such as ‘new thinking’, ‘cheap’, baggage’, to appear as depersonalised assessments.

Another mid-life female participant describes the state of old age in terms of visual stereotypes, using a metonymic concept to express them:

I’m not ready to have a **twinsset and purple rinse** and any of that...[F9-48]

Once again metaphorical language functions as a means of pinpointing certain aspects of old age in order to achieve distance from them. Thus F9-48 can foreground her negative evaluation of old age by drawing on some of the culturally enshrined semiotics of old age, (‘twinsset and purple rinse’), which perhaps also introduce a heteroglossic dimension to her evaluation, i.e. the assumption inherent in this metonymic concept is that these are commonly held attitudes and beliefs and therefore that her stance is readily explicable. The use of metaphor and metonymy is significant in that it reveals participants’ deeply held attitudes – in this case to age and youth. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphorical and metonymic concepts exist not merely as linguistic devices, but as fundamental mechanisms for constructing thought which ‘are part of the ordinary, everyday way we think and act as well as talk’ (1980: 37), absorbed and embedded within the language of everyday interaction, often operating at a subconscious level. The metaphorical language these participants use performs a number of functions in their talk: as mechanisms for expressing their own judgements, but also for achieving different degrees of alignment with regard to the viewpoints they encode; and as encapsulations of - vehicles for - the attitudes of prevailing culture. Thus youth is inherently positively evaluated through language choices focusing on the values of energy, freshness, renewal and revitalisation, (‘fresh blood’, ‘new thinking’). Age, by contrast, is not generally associated with positive attributes; vocabulary such as ‘baggage’ (F7-44), and ‘old world’³⁵ (M18-44), connote weight without gravitas, obsolescence without the mitigation of experience – the evaluative opposite of the values of youth. F9-48’s description of the ‘twinsset and purple rinse’ (see above) negatively characterises the state of old age through a metonymic concept rooted in appearance. It is

³⁵ Although it is worth noting that in other contexts ‘old world’ can be positive, connoting tradition and power.

interesting to note that in attempting to make sense of age and youth as abstract concepts whilst also establishing a stance with regard to them, participants choose linguistic devices which reflect and perpetuate culture's deeply embedded attitudes and evaluations, a phenomenon which could be a further indication of the extent to which public discourse manipulates private voices, perhaps all the more significant as the meanings these language features encode appear to operate below the level of conscious thought. When participants move from depersonalised evaluations of ageing as an abstract phenomenon to articulating the personal impacts of ageing, however, the linguistic resources they draw on signal a different attitudinal stance arising from different evaluative processes and degrees of engagement.

4.2.3 Personal impact: the visible signs of ageing

I still think of myself as an attractive younger woman I don't think of myself as middle-aged yet um.... but you know I have noticed here that my neck is starting to sag [F8-45]

I know I'm only well nearly 23 but you do I've noticed you know you notice the areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly now and you just think ooh... [F2-23]

The centrality of the body to the process of identity construction, as discussed in 2.3.2 above, and the complex demands placed upon it by the expectations and imperatives of consumer culture mean that the process of ageing, although experienced first and foremost through the body, is as much a culturally constructed as a physical phenomenon. When participants talk about ageing as it affects them personally, as exemplified in the two extracts above, it is experienced most immediately - and intensely - through physical changes in the body which are understood both as literal and symbolic transition markers through which they monitor and evaluate their own ageing process. The private voices of F2-23 and F8-45's self-evaluations indicate that from the second decade of the lifecourse onwards, physical changes are minutely scrutinised, signalled through mental process verbs ('I **have noticed** here that my neck is starting to sag', 'I've **noticed**...the areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly'). Not only that; throughout the data, this subjective gaze is consistently expressed through negative prosody, conveyed through linguistic features such as negatively evaluative lexical choices, connectives and qualifiers. Chapter 5 explores in greater depth the linguistic construction of this self-surveillance, which defines the "mirror moments" of all female participants in the study. Twigg writes that 'dominant culture teaches us to feel bad about aging and to start this

early, reading our bodies anxiously for signs of decay and decline' (2003: 61), and the influence of these cultural messages can be directly tracked in the language F8-45 and F2-23 and other female participants use to describe their bodily changes: e.g. the contrastive 'but' signals the change from a perceived state of youthfulness to the start of its diminishment, so F 45's assessment of herself, ('I still think of myself as an attractive younger woman') carries with it the foreshadowing of physical decline, ('**but**... I have noticed here that my neck is starting to sag...'), further reinforced by the negatively evaluative 'sag'. Similarly F2-23's acknowledgement that her chronological youthfulness ('I know I'm only well nearly 23') is for her no proof against the encroachment of ageing, ('**but** you do I've noticed... the areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly now'). As suggested above, the influence of cultural narratives of age-as-decline means that almost without exception all bodily changes are automatically construed as being the result of the ageing process, irrespective of other possible explanations such as lifestyle factors (e.g. smoking, diet), injury, lack of fitness, genetics, and are universally negatively evaluated, and by female participants in particular, imbued with symbolic significance as heralding the transition to a new (and unwelcome) phase in their lives.

Thus for the mid-life cohort in particular, it seems that the changes they observe in their bodies are visible proof of the reality of ageing, symbolic markers of entering the problematic territory of no longer young but not yet old for which there is no culturally approved trajectory. Amongst participants aged 75 and above, however, the physical changes of ageing are talked about with a different emphasis, related to their perceived role as signifiers of old age as a lifestage separated from the rest of the lifecourse (see 2.3.3 above). For these participants, whatever their physical state, there is a common stance towards the physical changes of old age whereby the language participants use to describe them becomes conflated with the language of illness (see 2.3.3 and 4.1.1 above); this in turn becomes the frame within which all physical changes are evaluated, as illustrated by an 80 year-old female participant as she discusses her (unfulfilled) desire to go travelling:

... then I look at it and think well you know I'm too old now [xxxx] go rushing around partly because my memory and that is something that um that does make me a little fearful I suppose because so many of my friends two of my best friends their husbands died of Alzheimer's...[F17-80]

F17-80 is an active and energetic woman who throughout her account up to that point, has made no mention of physical decline, and indeed through continued investment in her appearance (see 5.3.1 below) aligns herself more with the discourses of youthfulness than ageing, characterising herself as substantially younger than her 88 year-old husband:

I do know that underneath it all actually I think B [sc. husband] feels quite proud that he's got someone that looks younger.... [F17-80]

It is all the more significant therefore that she linguistically juxtaposes a reflection on her declining memory with a reference to Alzheimer's disease, indicating that in her mind the two phenomena are automatically related (see 4.2.1 above). This exemplifies the argument made by Gullette (1997) and Hepworth (2003) (see also chapter 2) that the taken-for-granted cultural narrative of decline both problematises and pathologises what might otherwise be accepted and evaluated as normal physical processes, with the result that ageing-as-illness becomes the defining narrative of this life stage. All bodily changes are therefore unquestioningly negatively evaluated as harbingers of ageing as a state of illness rather than ageing as a lifestage which can be defined by a wider and richer range of experiences than merely that of biological decline. Evidence from the accounts of their mirror moments of participants in their third decade onwards (see chapter 5) seems to suggest that visible signs of ageing may have an even deeper significance in terms of the part they play in the ageing process. Such bodily changes can 'herald a disconnect[ion] from one's sense of self' (Meyers 2002: 149), a disruption of the relationship between the different dimensions of selfhood, so that the face in the mirror is no longer felt to represent an individual's sense of their inner "true" self. Whilst these changes are often received as the unwelcome signals of change, they are also physical markers of the threat which the ageing body poses to the process of constructing a unified self-identity (see 2.2.4 above).

4.2.4 Ageing and the fragmentation of the Self

... I mean up to a year ago you wouldn't believe it but I didn't have any wrinkles and I got up one morning and lo and behold it was absolutely dreadful I looked in the mirror I thought flippin' eck and I was very very conscious then but up to that point you know... I hadn't really felt old you see... [F16-80]

... I remember when I first noticed the lines under my eyes and I must have been maybe in my 30s after a really really late night a heavy night and I was staying at a friend's house and I looked in the mirror and I thought ((sharp intake of breath)) I've got lines I'm getting old... [F8-45]

These extracts, from the accounts of women at different stages in their lives, illustrate the ontological shock caused by the appearance of visible signs of ageing, evaluated by the subjective gaze, in the privacy of the mirror moment. F16-80's narrative suggests that even in deep old age the realization that the body is changing ('up to a year ago you wouldn't believe it but I didn't have any wrinkles') can be both unexpected and traumatic, as expressed by her exclamation ('lo and behold'), appearing all the more so within the context of the mundane routines of her daily life which are irrevocably disrupted by her unwelcome discovery; the intensity of her negative evaluation is reflected in the upscaling of her negative language ('absolutely dreadful'). F8-45's account of a similar moment of realization is expressed non-verbally as a sharp intake of breath suggesting shock and dismay ('I looked in the mirror and I thought ((sharp intake of breath)) I've got lines I'm getting old'). At a fundamental level, for these women as for other female participants, the appearance of signs of ageing signals the disjunction between the outer body and the inner self; the nature of their reactions suggests that the face in the mirror is no longer one that they fully recognise.³⁶ Not only that, but in the context of cultural discourses which construct the body as the vehicle of self-identity (see 2.1.3 above) and which still encode the youthful female body as the only legitimate object of the cultural gaze, as discussed in chapter 5 F16-80 and F8-45 evaluate their ageing appearance as being at odds with cultural expectations of the female duty 'to be looked at' (Mulvey 2009: 19) as well as with their own sense of coherent selfhood.

The significance of the signs of bodily ageing and the role they play in notions of selfhood and the construction of age identity can be more deeply understood in the context of the imposition of the culturally constructed notion of peak and decline onto the lifecourse, as already discussed in section 4.1.1 above. Women in particular are deeply influenced by the cultural myth of "being in the prime of life", the notional point when outer body and inner self are perfectly unified in the production of gendered identity. The taken-for-granted decline which is assumed to follow the pinnacle moment is signaled by the appearance of visible signs of ageing, and it is these 'bodily betrayals' (Featherstone 1982 (1991):178) which at a certain moment force awareness of the uncertain and problematic intersections between ageing, gender and identity. Amongst participants from the mid-life cohort onwards,

³⁶ This sentiment is captured in Jane Shilling's (2012) autobiographical account of ageing *The Stranger in the Mirror*.

a common linguistic strategy for dealing with the increasing complexity of the relationship of self and ageing body is to conceptualise different selves, judged to be subject to different kinds of ageing and therefore to different evaluations. This is a complicated piece of attitudinal manoeuvring in which participants express their struggle to connect the notion of continuing selfhood with the reality of a changing, ageing body. Analysis of such complex personal responses can be contextualised by two different theoretical perspectives: theorisations of different kinds of ageing (i.e. Kastenbaum 1972, Featherstone and Hepworth 1991, Fairhurst 1998 see also 2.3.4 above), and the philosophical/linguistic approach in Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) work on the metaphorical structures used in articulating the notion of self.

A number of participants refer explicitly to the notion of an inner self which is seen as separate from the outer self as represented by the physical body, and which they invest with particular qualities/characteristics, as illustrated by two mid-life participants:

... I think there's also a separation of there's the physical age and the mental age um and you know you meet people who are definitely a very youthful 70 or even a youthful 75 just because of their outlook on life....until age becomes a physical debilitation in terms of what you can do I y'know I'd characterise it more by sort of attitude...[M18-44]

... some people are very young spirited at the age of 90 like P's [sc. husband] grandmother who's 94 now and still goes to her singing classes every week whereas my mother is 72 and she's been old since she was 45 because y'know she doesn't make the best use of her life...[F7-44]

The premise of Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphor and embodiment is that 'real people have embodied minds whose conceptual systems arise from, are shaped by, and are given meaning through living human bodies' (1999: 6). They argue that the study of the self, understood as 'the structure of our inner lives' (ibid: 267), originates in a 'general Subject-Self metaphor which conceptualizes a person as bifurcated' (ibid: 269). According to their argument people are divided into a Subject, defined as 'the locus of consciousness...and our "essence"' (ibid: 268) and a number of Selves which encompass what remains: 'our bodies, our social roles, our histories' (ibid). Subject and Self are thus distinct from each other and conceptualised through a metaphoric system grounded in the body, which produces a rich diversity of conceptual metaphors for expressing the different relationships of multiple Selves to the Subject. M18-44 and F7-44 exemplify a specific instance of metaphor identified by

Lakoff and Johnson as ‘the Folk Theory of Essences’ (1999: 269), which they explain as

each person is seen as having an Essence that is part of the Subject. The person may have more than one Self but only one of those Selves is compatible with that Essence. This is called the “real” or “true” self. (ibid)

In distinguishing between the inner self and the physical body, M18-44 and F7-44 employ different conceptual metaphors for the inner self, e.g. ‘attitude’, ‘outlook on life’, ‘spirit’, which lead to the same point: both participants are trying to convey through language what they see as the ‘Essence’ of the person, defined by qualities which somehow represent the “real” person and as such are more genuine, truthful and meaningful dimensions against which these individuals should be judged. The abstract and intangible nature of the language they use (‘sort of attitude’), seemingly intended to convey timelessness, also expresses a paradox: both M18-44 and F7-44 present the inner self as defying chronology, untouched by time and therefore perhaps more powerful than time (‘you meet people who are ... a very youthful 75 just because of their outlook on life...’) and yet the positive prosody in both extracts, in which the inner self in its diverse linguistic guises is qualified by a positively evaluative adjective such as ‘youthful’ or ‘young’, suggests at the same time a desire to conceptualise the inner self as eternally youthful rather than ageless. Indeed the youthful inner self is evaluated as the opposite state to the ‘physical debilitation’ of M18-44’s account and the failure to ‘make the best use of her life’ with which F7-44 accuses her mother. In this way participants appear actively to correlate the notion of the inner self with their ideas - and hopes - regarding successful ageing. It could therefore be argued that the real ‘identity trouble’ occurs when the inner self and the physical shell which contains it, are no longer considered compatible, when the body as the expression of the outer self can no longer be relied upon as a desirable or even adequate expression of self-identity. At the same time, however, as chapter 2 discussed, identity is fundamentally and inescapably an embodied phenomenon; the reality of the body cannot be denied and the tension between the ageing body and the need to maintain a stable self-identity (see Giddens 1991) is an increasing factor.

The ways in which participants talk about the outer body contrast strongly with their conceptualisations of the inner self, indicating the conflict many of them feel between these dimensions of selfhood; this is exemplified by a 56 year-old female participant:

I do think that yes it's nice to be wise but the trouble is with the knowledge and the experience unfortunately you get the other side of it which is that the body is (.) deteriorating...[F12-56]

F12-56 describes the ageing body as 'deteriorating', which in lexical terms denotes decay and decline and through its grammatical form suggests a continuing process of decrepitude. Her negative stance towards the physical process of ageing is overtly reinforced through the adverbial stance marker 'unfortunately', but underlined in a more subtle way by linguistic strategies which encode lack of engagement (see chapter 3 and Appendix 1): e.g. the distancing 'you' ('unfortunately **you** get the other side of it') and the substitution of the definite article for the possessive pronoun ('**the** body is deteriorating'). Thus having characterised the body as an unreliable and fragile physical shell which potentially diminishes the whole, F12-56 is then able to detach herself from her own perception by avoiding the more direct ownership and involvement of the personal pronoun. The tendency to use depersonalised language when describing the ageing appearance features in the accounts of many participants and is analysed more fully in chapter 5. These articulations of inner self versus outer body, seen in the extracts above and generally observed throughout the data, are at the most fundamental level of language, also expressions of culture's polarised attitudes towards youth and age; thus the inner self, described in the language of youthfulness, energy and vitality, is seen as defying chronological age, sitting in continuous contrast to the negatively evaluated state of being old, represented by the physical body. As outlined in chapter 2, these findings can be contextualised by research of continuing relevance in this field: e.g. Fairhurst's study on the social construction of older women, which reports that participants distinguish between the physical body and the self, seeing them 'as two separate entities' (1998: 268) and viewing the inner self as untouched by the changing outward appearance of the body; and Featherstone and Hepworth's conceptualisation of 'the mask of ageing' (1988: 371) (see also 4.1.1 above).

When participants articulate attitudes towards age/ing and notions of self they frequently draw on the verbs ‘look’ and ‘feel’, as exemplified in the following extracts from mid-life male and female participants:

... there’s a it’s there is a **look** element but at the same time there is an attitude element
[M18-44]

... you **don’t feel** that mentally you **don’t feel** any different from when you were 25 30 ...
but after that **do I feel** any different not really...[M18-44]

... you **look** in the mirror and you see a different you know you don’t **feel** any different inside... it’s the visible things when you **look** in the mirror that makes you realize that you’re not that young free and single person that you once were... whereas if you don’t look in the mirror you can keep thinking you’re 18 (la)...[F7-44]

I think age is just a number and you are only as old as you **feel** [F12-56]

All three participants use ‘look’ and ‘feel’ in complex ways: to distinguish between the inner self and its outer physical manifestation; to signify different kinds of ageing; and to express the different evaluative perspectives of the subjective gaze and ‘the gaze of the Other’. Their use of ‘look’ and ‘feel’ could also be interpreted in the context of Lakoff and Johnson’s ‘objective standpoint metaphor’ (1999: 277) which they relate to the primary metaphor of the ‘locational self’ (1999: 274) in which the self is conceptualised as a container:

If you are inside an enclosure, you can’t see the outside of the enclosure. Given the metaphor that Knowing is Seeing, vision from the inside is knowledge from the inside – subjective knowledge. If you want to know how your enclosure appears from the outside, you have to go outside and look. Vision from the outside is knowledge from the outside – objective knowledge. (ibid: 277)

F7-44’s extract in particular exemplifies such complicated positioning work: her account of her mirror moment shifts between ‘look’ and ‘feel’ as she differentiates between the evaluations of the subjective gaze on the inner self (‘you don’t **feel** any different inside’) versus the imagined ‘objective knowledge’ contained in evaluations of the outer body (‘you **look** in the mirror and you **see** a different....’, ‘it’s the visible things when you **look** in the mirror’). Her language expresses the sense of disjunction she experiences between the physical body, defined in Lakoff and Johnson’s terms by the ‘vision from the outside’, represented by the ‘visible things’ she sees reflected in the mirror’s lens, and the ‘subjective knowledge’ of the ‘Essential Self’, characterised by her as ‘that young free and single person that you once were’ which, whilst seemingly remaining untouched by these physical changes, is nonetheless threatened by the changing outer body. Indeed for F7-44 as for many other female participants, their sense of disconnection between the Essential Self and the outer

body is revealed by, and lived through, the mirror as it mediates the complex intersection between the personal and the cultural gaze. In F7-44's account it appears that the cultural gaze - the 'vision from the outside' - triumphs, in that through the medium of the mirror's lens, it '**makes you** realize' the extent of the separation between self and body.

These findings can be further understood in the context of Kastenbaum's 1972 study which, despite its vintage, remains a relevant reference point for contemporary empirical perspectives on ageing. Kastenbaum's research identifies two components in people's definition and assessment of personal age - 'look age' and 'feel age' (1972, *passim*) - reporting findings which suggest that 'feel age' might be a closer indication of an individual's assessment of their "real" age (see also section 2.3.4 of this study). His findings correlate with the linguistic evidence in this study, and lend support to the argument that personal age and the way in which it is evaluated is a multi-dimensional rather than a unitary phenomenon and that, moreover, chronological age may be less relevant in what he terms 'the confederation of specific ages' (1972: 200). This is illustrated in M18-44's narrative (see above), in which through his repeated use of 'you don't feel' juxtaposed with references to chronological markers ('you don't feel any different from when you were **25 30...**') he seeks to negate their power. F12-56's recourse to a commonly used expression, ('age is just a number and you are only as old as you feel'), indicates the extent to which the difference between 'look' and 'feel' age as metaphors for inside versus outside knowledge of the self as Lakoff and Johnson argue, has entered the collective consciousness. Thus what M18-44 and F12-56 as well as other participants may be attempting to reinforce through these linguistic distinctions is the validity of the subjective gaze in the face of the pressures of the cultural expectations often contained within chronological categorisations; look age encodes the judgement of the external gaze (how I look to others) and its potential imposition on the individual gaze (what I see when I look in the mirror). Although Featherstone and Hepworth have argued that 'chronological age continues to be discredited as an indicator of inevitable age norms and lifestyles' (1991: 374), the analysis of media discourses in chapter 7 of this present study as well as empirical evidence from the interview data, suggest that the relationship between look age and chronological age remains an uneasy, problematic and yet highly significant part of day-to-day lived experience of ageing. This is illustrated by a 45 year-old female participant:

... one of the things which is awful.... is that my daughter has just started school so I've got a **4 year-old** and **I'm 45** so there are people in her class mothers who are in their **late 20s**... but I have to admit that I have lied about my age.... [F8-45]

Her rapid listing of the chronological relativities which face her on a daily basis (I've got a **4 year-old**...I'm **45**....in her class mothers who are in their **late 20s**...) suggests the continuing importance not only of look age but also of chronological markers as a component in the complex evaluative infrastructure of an individual's ageing process.

Thus the language participants use in articulating the personal meaning that ageing holds for them suggests that the signs of ageing have a significance far beyond the physical, are viewed as heralding the breakdown of the unity of self and body. The age-and appearance-based ideologies which characterise the current cultural context (see section 2.1.1 above) materially influence the relationship between female participants in particular and their bodies, one which Bartky characterises as 'a permanent posture of disapproval' (1990: 40). How women evaluate their bodies at any age, but particularly *as* they age is shaped by these powerful discourses which construct the female body, and specifically the ageing female body, as inherently problematic and 'deficient' (Bordo 1990: *ibid*, see also Furman 1997, Twigg 2003, Bordo 1993, Wolf 1991). Individual accounts in this present study show that all bodily changes are, without exception, negatively evaluated through a continuous process of critical self-scrutiny, already well underway in the second decade of the lifecourse, which remains a lifelong source of concern and anxiety. Furthermore, the data suggests that for female participants much of the angst generated by the physical signs of ageing is intimately connected to the importance they attach to appearance, whilst male participants, seemingly operating within a different evaluative context, appear more accepting of such physical changes.

4.3 Constructing age and gender identity

As already discussed, the relationship of the ageing self and the feminine self is linguistically, emotionally and socially problematic in ways which have a genuine impact on the women in this study – whilst remaining relatively unacknowledged in the literature (see 2.0 above). Here, this intersection is further explored through the subjective experiences of four female participants: three mid-lifers and one in the fourth age as defined by Grenier (2012). The analysis examines the linguistic strategies these women use as they actively engage in the

process of identity construction, attempting to accommodate both gender and age identities and their accounts exemplify themes already discussed in earlier sections of this study: attitudes to personal ageing; the nature of identity and in particular embodied identity; the preeminence of the body; culturally generated standards regarding female appearance. These participants are at different lifestages and therefore encompass a range of attitudes towards ageing and its impact on their bodies and sense of self. Nonetheless, they share a common assumption that ageing and the appearance are indivisible in the complex process of constructing age identity. All acknowledge that they are ageing in a complex cultural environment in which powerful discourses coalesce around the ageing female body, discourses which they may resent and perhaps reject but which they nonetheless absorb and which play a significant role in shaping their attitudes and stances. Furthermore, all four participants display a degree of conscious awareness of how they are choosing to perform ageing (see 2.2.1 above) as the following extracts illustrate:

... I expect to be 65 and having the occasional big night out so that's where I think I am fighting the ageing thing yeah I am because I don't think it should matter.... [F11-54]

... for me I think don't look like mutton dressed as lamb that's something I would worry about.... and I think also to make the best of yourself so of course I wear makeup I know some women who don't bother after a certain age but I do try to wear makeup that makes me look good for my age.... [F15-75]

The language in these extracts conveys self-awareness and purposeful choices, ('that's where I think I am fighting the ageing thing', 'so of course I wear makeup'). The readiness with which these women are able to articulate a sense of age identity is an indication both that this is a matter of some importance to them at a personal level and that it is the subject of an ongoing process of reflection beyond the somewhat artificial nature of the interview situation. The way the women position themselves with regard to their ageing shows the tension between the desire for self-chosen identity and the strength of the cultural conditioning - what Gullette terms 'the universalised decline narrative' (1997: 218) - which potentially undermines it.

(i) F7-44: ageing as regret

F7-44's body is the central focus of her sense of self-identity, the seat of her wellbeing and the 'dominant signifier' (Woodward 1991:10) of her own ageing process. Much of the

discontent and regret she expresses with regard to ageing focuses on changes she registers in her appearance:

... you become less happy with how you look I don't want to have wrinkles and grey hair
[F7-44]

She uses a verb of negative affect – 'I don't want' - to reject wholeheartedly these visible signs of ageing, the absence of hedges intensifying the force of her negative evaluation.

However, she invests her body with greater significance than just as a signifier of her ageing:

... I used to run around in teeny weeny shorts and teeny weeny T shirts showing off my body when I was younger and I was very proud of that....[F7-44]

It is a feature of her speech style that she contrasts her ageing appearance - characterised by negative prosody - with her youthful self which is positively evaluated; indeed, in describing the pride she took in her body as a younger woman she conflates her youthful appearance with the state of youthfulness itself. The language she uses elsewhere in her narrative to characterise her youthful self, ('young', 'free',) and in the extract above ('teeny weeny shorts', 'showing off my body') clearly indicate that for her, youth and beauty are synonymous, and that implicitly, age/ing and beauty are antithetical. Thus her youthful body is more than the signifier of her attractiveness, it represents the carefree state of pre-adulthood before time, age, responsibility and maternity have made their mark upon it. Her feminine self appears so intimately bound up in her sense of the attractiveness/desirability of her youthful body, that accommodating the physical reality of ageing within that is a problematic process, described in terms of regret and ambivalence:

... I think people wouldn't call me a girl anymore but I want to be called a girl and there is the kind of school thing you become a Mrs ... I think generally the move from being a girl to a lady... but once you're a lady or a woman you're different you're not young... [F7-44]

It is significant that her desire to continue to be referred to as 'a girl', and to refer to her close friends in this way is expressed consciously, with awareness of its evaluative implications.

'Girl' in this context becomes a densely loaded term, representing the idealised state of oneness of the 'Essential Self' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 282) with a body which (briefly) conforms to both inner and externally driven standards of physical attractiveness, and defines a carefree time in her life, now lost but recalled with regret. It is set in opposition to the less desirable state of 'lady or woman' in which 'different' connotes 'not young' and is therefore negatively evaluated. This reveals not only the continuing centrality of youthfulness to her construction of her self-identity, but also the impact of the cultural 'age ideology' (Gullette

1997:3) which places a premium on youth and creates a relationship of dependency between youth, beauty and femininity (see 2.2.1 above).

(ii) F9-48: Ageing as denial

F9-48's discursive construction of age identity is characterised by the language of denial, which distances, negates and linguistically sidesteps both ageing and gender:

I **don't think about it** [sc. ageing] a great deal to be honest [F9-48]

I live quite a hectic life you don't I **don't really stop to think** about it [F9-48]

Her professed attitude to ageing can be traced back to the intertwined relationship between her view of her own body and the way she constructs her feminine self:

... I've got an older sister who was very girly and a younger brother and I tended to be the tomboy in the middle and I was a very late developer.... but I didn't have that girly education then you know I boarded I was a late developer amongst all the boarders...so I didn't have those girly break time lunch time comparing products which I know my daughter's had a lot more of [F9-48]

This has directly shaped what ageing means for her emotionally and physically. Her descriptions of her adolescent self locate her gender identity in a genderless domain, defined by words such as 'tomboy' and 'late developer' but also by the absence of 'girliness', a word - and a theme - she returns to on several occasions throughout her account. She employs this as a short-code for an entire domain of stereotypical femininity which she either eschews or feels unable to participate in:

... I think to be honest they [sc. girlfriends] have different girly conversations that I'm probably not part of... I just don't get it and... we all know I don't get it so it doesn't it's not my priority and I can't pretend it is...[F9-48]

Consequently, the evaluative loading she confers on 'girliness' is decidedly ambivalent:

... whereas for some people who live with really serious regrets then there are things I could have done better... but yeah I probably should have had a better girly education but ((la))... [F9-48]

Her choice of language contrasts 'really serious regrets' with the triviality of 'a better girly education'; the intensification of 'really' and her tongue-in-cheek laughter reinforce what are for her very different levels of regret. As an older woman she has constructed an identity deliberately not based around appearance or attractiveness; on several occasions she emphasises a different set of priorities:

... for me it's more important to try and please the clients than try out the new blusher [F9-48]

Her attitude to her body is one of pride in an efficient mechanism:

... but I just feel really lucky I don't feel really old yet... 'cos I'm still quite supple I do Pilates... I can still do a handstand and a cartwheel if I challenge myself...[F9-48]

Thus for her the ageing process does not appear to represent the loss of beauty and sexual allure so much as a threat to the efficient working of the machine, which she will continue to deny until it makes its presence felt in the areas of her life which are important to her.

Furthermore, appearance as an expression of the feminine self is not accorded particular importance in her projections of successful ageing for herself:

probably not so much what I look like unless I put on 3 stone by mistake somehow I think being fit I'm not that fit but you know being able to run for the bus.... I think that's quite important...[F9-48]

In intentionally positioning herself to one side of the youth-beauty-femininity equation and indeed at times taking an overtly negative stance towards what she construes as stereotypical femininity, she signals that she has built her identity as an older woman on other foundations:

...I'm not 24 blonde and trying to flirt with the client to get the work I've got I don't know if eloquence is the right word but I've got my own background to back me up to give me gravitas...[F9-48]

She establishes an implicit contrast between the stereotype contained within the negatively evaluative '24 blonde and trying to flirt', and the identity she has chosen to foreground, defined by inherently positive adjectives such as 'eloquence' and 'gravitas' suggesting depth rather than triviality, within which gender has been subsumed. When she does acknowledge that appearance has a role, it a function of her professional identity:

... having run my own business only for a year... I'm more aware whether my clothes fit properly rather than just bunging on another suit that's uniform... but I've always felt I look smart enough I'm representing a company whereas actually I'm representing me I am the front person of my company...[F9-48]

This language clearly positions appearance in the realm of the working environment; for the first time she is the public face of her own company, and as such she views her appearance almost as a professional tool rather than an aspect of her subjective identity. Even then she articulates her efforts with her appearance in terms of functionality, 'whether my clothes fit properly', rather than in more emotional terms. Twigg's description of clothing and dress (see chapter 2) as 'standing ...at the interface between the body and the social world' (2007: 301) indicates the importance of this aspect of the appearance as a focus for complex discourses concerning embodied identity, femininity and agency. The detached way in which F9-48 talks about clothes suggests that for her they do not belong with the other 'insignia of a

gendered body' (Woodward 1991: 3) but are a means for her to perform another aspect of her identity which for her is more meaningful, that of 'the front person of my company'.

However, as F9-48 looks towards her old age, the insignia of femininity appear to have slightly more prominence within her age identity, but framed in modalised terms:

... at least I might have the time to research a better foundation that works....[F9-48]

Her use of modality, ('I **might** have the time'), and minimisers ('at least') indicate her lack of commitment to the proposition; perhaps there is also a sense in which she feels a faint obligation to accommodate some of the discourses of femininity within her age identity, that at some level, despite her protestations, she too is susceptible to the cultural narrative of 'the construction and maintenance of the female body' (Furman 1997:5). In some ways F9-48 offers a counter-discourse to some of society's 'narrative indoctrination' (Gullette 1997: 218) concerning both ageing-as-decline and the performance of ageing feminine identity.

Woodward writes of women's marketability as 'continu[ing] to depend in great part on their attractiveness' (1991: 159), which in turn is contingent upon youthfulness. For F9-48 her marketability is central to her identity, but in a literal professional sense in which neither age(ing) nor gender are particularly relevant. For her, ageing is primarily a physical rather than an aesthetic process which her physical robustness allows her to ignore. Furthermore, as she appears to experience her body in a functional way as female rather than overtly feminine, the intersection of her ageing and the feminine self is not composed of regret for the loss of beauty, but is rather seen as a group of physical changes (i.e. menopause) to be managed and accommodated.

(iii) F11-54: Ageing as war

In her reflections on the personal impact of ageing, F11-54 draws a deliberate and explicit distinction between ageing and beauty (her gloss for appearance/ attractiveness), which she 'put[s] into 2 different buckets'. This distinction generates two separate repertoires, one relating to ageing and another concerned with beauty. Her 'ageing discourse', which encapsulates her attitude to her own ageing and from which her age identity is composed, is one of fierce resistance, based in the language of combat:

I just think you can **beat** age with physical health...[F11-54]

... that's where I am **fighting** the ageing thing yeah I am...[F11-54]

She characterises physical ageing as a battle between her will and the forces of nature:

... so sometimes if I get up to walk you know particularly in the morning I'm stiff and I'm just a little bit ooh **nature is after me**... [F11-54]

so so the minute....I don't feel so good **I don't just think well that's part of life**... I think this is **unacceptable** I must feel good at all times... [F11-54]

Her use of the emphatically negative adjective 'unacceptable' and the strength of the modal 'must' indicate the power of her determination. By contrast, her 'beauty discourse' is one of acceptance based on a dispassionate assessment of her own aesthetic status (see 5.3 below):

...I've always been you know somewhat overweight and that's **always been fine**... [F11-54]

I don't fit into a lot of designer clothes so **I think fine** I'll have watches and bags so there's a **lot of acceptance** in there... [F11-54]

These seemingly contradictory articulations have their genesis in the way F11-54 constructs her feminine self and within that the role she gives to appearance; together these shape her attitude to her body. In her assessment of her appearance, beauty as it is conventionally defined has little place:

... on the beauty front which is a whole different bucket I think I am uncommonly accepting of how I am so I think that I look average I think I've always looked average... [F11-54]

As she ages, F11-54's quest is not for the recovery of lost, youthful beauty, but rather a pragmatic, maintenance driven view of her body, illustrating Bartky's (1990) description of the female body as a task and continual work-in-progress; but for F11-54 this is a task undertaken without a sense of angst:

... why have I not made the time to do that [sc. plastic surgery] ...so it's eminently pragmatic... [F11-54]

The word 'pragmatic' occurs repeatedly in her account as a self-selected description of her attitudes both personal and professional. In this way she establishes her positioning with regard to her own appearance as one of detached, objective action-oriented acceptance, 'I just need to get it taken care of'. There are also echoes in F11-54's words of Bartky's description of the 'intimations of inferiority' (1990: 29) she sees as directed at women by the fashion/beauty industry, arguing that the constructions of femininity offered by women's magazines teach women 'how to be better, i.e., more "feminine," women' (1990: 36), and F11-54 has undoubtedly absorbed these discourses and the norms and standards of appearance they generate into her own linguistic repertoire.

These discourses have meaning for her as part of her personal war against ageing rather than an attempt to make herself beautiful. Indeed she has managed to balance an awareness of externally generated standards with her own inner driven ones (see 5.3 below) and constructed her feminine self out of this process of accommodation:

... in my 20s if I was feeling bad about my appearance.... I would have counted the number of people I thought looked better or worse than me so that I would have a real standard but what that ... is evolved to is **how do I look for me relative to me** and I think that would have come from we would have been a family that would have emphasised... you should **make the most of what you have** is probably the core of what I think...[F11-54]

It is clear from her account that F11-54's feminine identity is based around other dimensions than conventionally defined standards of female beauty. Hers is built out of a force, drive and energy which is physical, emotional and sexual:

I wanna feel good and live every day...[F11-54]

I must feel good at all times...[F11-54]

... I don't think it's [sc. menopause] loss of fertility it's I don't want to feel bad and I want to have a healthy sex life for a long time...[F11-54]

Her mode of expression is that of almost aggressive physical wellbeing, articulated through certain language features which characterise her discourse style: unhedged verbs of affect ('I wanna'); as previously noted, modals of obligation, ('I must'), which have the effect of a demand she makes directly of her body; upscaled lexical choices (i.e. 'blaze'), as shown in the extract below. Even her attitude to menopause is not one of regret for loss of femininity as defined by fertility, but rather fear of the loss of energy and drive - encapsulated in her articulation 'I don't want to feel bad' – and the diminution of her sexual energy. Her body is the instrument and expression of a feminine identity driven by energy rather than appearance, and this is what she sees as under threat from the process of ageing, as her feminine self and her ageing self are forced to intersect. Her response is to articulate an age identity based on energetic resistance rather than regret,

... my expectation is firmly that **I will not age**...[F11-54]

I think **we have to blaze** a new trail and so those things like 70 is the new 50 50 is the new 30 I believe that and I feel it's right to blaze that trail...[F11-54]

(iv) F15-75: Ageing as circumscribed resistance

At 75, F15-75 is in deep old age, having passed through the mid-life lifestage of the other three women. Commentary in the field of age and gender (see chapter 2, also section 4.1 above) suggests that the fourth age holds particular challenges in terms of the construction of

ageing femininity; Railton and Watson's (2012) study of Madonna as one representation of ageing femininity describes the constraints and dualities embedded in the many contemporary public discourses surrounding female ageing:

being a successful older woman, as defined by the Daily Mail, is, therefore, predicated on a contradiction between two instances or levels of performance: an acknowledgment or "admittance" of one's actual age in the first instance with the careful masking of that age in the second (2012: 200).

On a similar theme, Woodward opines that 'the social codes of dress and behaviour in relation to old age are strict and confining' (1991:150), and in a more recent paper poses the question 'at what point can it be said that age supersedes the salience of gender?' (2006:177). In evaluating how she is performing her own ageing, and how friends are performing theirs, F15-75 indicates that a degree of resistance is still important to her, that appearance remains a central concern:

I have a friend who's going to be 80 this year and we all comment on the fact that she **looks good for her age** she **cares about her appearance** and to some extent she's a role model for the rest of us...[F15- 5]

... and I think also to make the best of yourself so of course I wear makeup I know some women who don't bother after a certain age but I do try to wear makeup that makes me **look good for my age**...[F15-75]

I feel basically I think I'm **quite good for my age** I do I think there are many people who are as old as me who I think don't take as much **pride in their appearance** as me...[F15-75]

The continuing significance of these aesthetic standards can be seen in the semantic prosody in these extracts in which 'appearance' is often prefixed by a verb combination such as 'cares about' or a nominal construction such as 'pride in'. Such lexical choices encode her positive evaluation, based on her belief that this is an appropriate course of action in order to achieve the desired goal, which she expresses as 'looking/being good for my/her age', and which entails the need for an appropriate degree of resistance to the process of ageing. The phrase 'looking good for my age' appears with sufficient frequency in her account to suggest its centrality to her performance of age identity, as well as indicating the powerful impact of cultural requirements of ageing femininity, and illustrating Sontag's argument that a culturally generated double standard applies different rules to men and women, imposing 'a relentless pressure on women to maintain their appearance at a certain high standard' (1978: 77). As F15-75 shows, this pressure is experienced as a lifelong concern, and is of

fundamental importance to how she accommodates her femininity within the process of ageing. She describes the penalties involved in not taking care of appearance:

I have another friend who's a very negative role model in that she doesn't make any effort to look good....she's very involved with her grandchildren but she looks dowdy...[F15-75]

This is a complex stretch of discourse in terms of the attitudes it embodies. The word 'effort', which appears several times in her account, echoes her use of the word 'bother' in the extract above. Both belong to a set of semantic choices which evaluate femininity as a form of duty (see Sontag 1972 (1978)) requiring work and maintenance. Furman writes that 'femininity as we know it.... is not a "natural" endowment of women' (1997: 46). F15-75's words seem to support this view, and suggest furthermore a view of femininity as a construction project, socially driven, personally interpreted and enacted through continued investment in the appearance - clothes, makeup, hair styling etc. The price of neglect is to be designated 'dowdy', a strongly negatively-loaded adjective which connotes shabbiness and a down-at-heel, uncared for, unfashionable appearance that represents, in Furman's words, 'a feminine failure' (1997: 55). Not even her assiduousness as a grandmother redeems the friend in question from the label of dowdiness; the contrastive 'but' suggests that this is not an excuse for what F15-75 evaluates as 'moral laxitude' (Featherstone 1982 (1991):178).

As with other participants (see above) F15-75's concern about her appearance is less about beauty as it is conventionally defined, or indeed at her age, about chasing lost youth – although in common with all the female participants in the study she hedges her bets, conscious of society's expectations:

... but you are very much under pressure you know my common sense side says it's a waste of time but my other side that thinks ooh it might just help to make you look less wrinkled so I'll try it anyway...[F15-75]

'Looking good for my age' expresses a desire which is located precisely at the intersection of ageing and gender; for her it means continuing to look good as an ageing *woman*. Silver's (2003) study on gendered identities in old age comments on the way ageing female bodies, once they move beyond the reproductive milestone of the menopause with its perceived decrease in the likelihood of 'attract[ing] the gaze of men' (2003: 386), are more likely to be degendered by language and perception. F15-75's continuing investment in her ageing

appearance is an attempt to keep the degendering³⁷ nature of ageing at bay. In terms of Woodward's question regarding the salience of age versus gender in old age, Silver reports that 'in the third and fourth ages.... [g]ender categorization becomes less salient than age as a way to self-define'. F15-75's account suggests that, although the demands of a weakening body may at some point change the balance between her ageing self and her feminine self, she has not yet reached that point and that her face and body are still 'the continuing site of [gender] identity' (Woodward 2006: 177).

4.4 Summary

The analysis in this chapter has shown that for individuals in this study, as a day-to-day lived experience, ageing is far from being a homogenous process, but rather is diverse, often conflicted and contradictory, and understood on a range of dimensions which are subject to different evaluations and articulations. The impact of public discourses which construct age/ing as a process of decline, and its visible signs as unacceptable and 'unwatchable' (Coupland 2003: 136), are directly discernible in the private voices of participants' evaluations of their own ageing. Thus whilst the signs of physical ageing are generally imbued with a negative significance as the signifiers of (unwelcome) transition points in the lifecourse, as 4.3 above and chapter 5 discuss, appearance remains the most significant index of ageing. Furthermore, the cultural attitudes which inscribe participants' mirror moments - in which the ageing appearance is monitored and assessed - mean that without exception the subjective gaze negatively evaluates and struggles to accept ageing as a physical phenomenon. The influence of cultural and media counter-discourses which evaluate the ageing appearance more positively (see chapters 6 and 7) have, seemingly, yet to make an impact on these daily personal moments of self-evaluation. The exploration of the private voices of ageing continues in chapter 5, focusing on evaluations of the ageing appearance.

³⁷ Section 2.2.6 above discusses the important distinction to be made between 'degendering' and 'desexualising'.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRIVATE VOICES (II): DISCOURSES OF AGEING AND APPEARANCE

5.0 Introduction

Building on the analysis of private voices in chapter 4 which investigates how participants use language to articulate the complex notion of ageing, this chapter shows how female participants use language to construct and evaluate their ageing appearance. This is a particular and highly personally significant dimension of the ageing process which is explored through the complex literal and symbolic event of participants' "mirror moments", in which the physical changes of ageing and their impact on the appearance of the body, and of the face as the particular 'dominant signifier' of ageing (Woodward 1991:10), are evaluated by both the subjective and wider cultural gaze. The themes emerging from the analysis in this chapter contextualise the exploration undertaken in chapter 6 of the public evaluations of the ageing appearance encoded in a range of anti-ageing skincare advertisements.

5.1 "The mirror moment"

In old age we might say.... that in western culture all mirrors are potentially threatening.
(Woodward 1991: 67)

... it's the visible things when you look in the mirror that makes you realize you're not that young free and single person you once were... [F7-44]

In every interview carried out in this study, participants disclose a moment of self-evaluation, such as the one exemplified in the extract above, which takes place in front of the mirror. This appears to be a common experience to all participants, irrespective of identity differentiators such as age, gender, nationality, lifestage or socio-economic status. The nature of this mirror moment, and the language participants use to describe and evaluate it, illustrates the complex relationship not only between individuals and their ageing process but also between private and public voices of ageing (see chapter 1). Meyers' comment that 'every mirror is culturally inscribed' (2002:132) implies that the reflected image can never be neutrally viewed or received; indeed evidence from the data in this study is that the moment in front of the mirror, as much symbolic as literal as stated above, is freighted with different evaluative perspectives – often negative, as Woodward's words (above) imply - so that what

is reflected back is not merely an individual face, but a terrain where personal and social identities, notions of selfhood and interpretations of cultural norms are constructed. The above extract from a 44 year-old female participant illustrates the constantly shifting nature of the mirror's evaluative lens; not only the vehicle of self-evaluation at its most private and personal, ('it's the visible things when you look in the mirror'), but also the lens which embodies 'the gaze of the Other' (Bartky 1990: 38), the voice of external evaluation which forces her to acknowledge the reality of her own ageing appearance. Thus it seems the mirror has a complex role to play not only as the vehicle for assessing and judging the appearance, but at the even more fundamental level of identity construction.

5.1.1 The mirror and identity

The significance of the mirror image as a mechanism of self-identification has been analysed in Jacques Lacan's seminal work on the nature of subjectivity and otherness, 'The Mirror stage as formative of the I function' (1949, (1966), 2006 translation). Sabine Melchior-Bonnet's (2001) exploration of the history of the mirror, describes the changing role of the mirror image over time, transitioning from being the instrument of introspection - the lens of the moral self - to the means by which the appearance is constructed and monitored. She writes that

one did not look at oneself in the mirror, the mirror looked at you; the mirror dictated its own laws and served as a normative instrument for measuring conformity to the social code' (2001: 134).

Similarly, in his monograph on mirrors in art, Jonathan Miller commented that

... the mirror, in art as in life, has assumed complex metaphorical significance, epitomizing both the vice of vanity and the virtue of prudent self-knowledge (1998: 13)

The ambivalent relationship between individuals in this study and their reflections is in part a result of the duality of the mirror's lens and its complex role as 'the fragile bridge linking the inner and exterior worlds' (Melchior-Bonnet 2001: 247), in which what is inner and what is external, what is "real" and what is reflected are held up to the evaluative gaze. A 56 year-old female participant illustrates the complex nature of the evaluative process:

... if you have one of those magnifying mirrors you think hmmm.... and you look and you think you do it in that awful light you know when you've got all that light streaming in at you...[F12-56]

F12-56 recounts the moment in front of the mirror in terms of exposure, in which there is nowhere to hide from the combination of magnification and bright light, described as 'awful'

and ‘streaming in *at* you’; the preposition, commonly occurring in ‘aim’ and ‘target’ verbal structures, conveys her sense of almost being under attack. Yet she has chosen to bring this moment about; this is a description of a ritual - willingly undertaken - in which the face is laid bare in order to be assessed by the most intimate and personal gaze, that of the self by the self. The private voice of her subjective identity narrates the next step in the ritual, which is the preparation of the social face to meet the gaze of others:

... you think right if I can make myself look reasonable in this that I find acceptable chances are I’ll look pretty ok when I walk out of the door...[F12-56]

The phrase ‘when I walk out of the door’ symbolises the moment of transition between private and public domains, and by extension the subjective and projected dimensions of identity (see 2.3 above), mediated by the mirror’s ‘fragile bridge’. The following is from a 64 year-old female participant:

... you can look in the mirror and sometimes you might think you but if you look it’s like when I went to the Hairy Bikers and I saw myself on TV I saw how old I look to everybody else...[F14-64]

Her narrative illustrates another aspect of the complex interplay between different evaluative perspectives. F14-64 holds a certain mental image of herself, perhaps taken from a previous phase in the lifecourse when for her the inner and outer selves were in alignment (see 4.2.4 above); this is implicitly rather than overtly expressed by the juxtaposition of ‘think’ and ‘look’, as her mental image of herself meets the reality of the reflected image. Her hopes of finding her mind’s eye picture confirmed in the mirror are negated by the ‘but’ which introduces the next clause. The tentative nature of this hope is expressed as a series of clauses started and not completed, modalised (‘you **might** think’), and rendered even more hypothetical by the use of ‘if’; (‘you can look in the mirror and sometimes you might think but **if** you look...’). As with other female participants in the study, she encounters a ‘stranger in the mirror’ (see Shilling 2012, also footnote 33), which is also a realisation of what the gaze of others sees, (‘I saw myself on TV I saw how old I look to everybody else...’). She experiences her image on the TV monitor in an even less forgiving way than her image in the mirror; this may be explained by the more private and intimate nature of the relationship with the personal mirror, which is an essentially private one, conducted mostly in solitude, whereas the TV monitor is a vehicle for public consumption. There is, however, a disjunction between the inner and outer self, the internalised image and the reality. As Meyers comments,

instead of encountering the face one has identified with, however ambivalently, one confronts an alien image. This face is disconnected from one’s sense of self...(2002: 148).

In fact, the sense of encountering a stranger in the mirror, an alien image embodied in the reflected face, exerts a powerful influence over many of the individuals in this study and although this seems to affect the female participants more deeply than the men, one of the male participants also appears to experience it to some degree:

... I think I don't know you hold a self image of yourself which is 10 years younger than you probably are um so it's it's [sc. looking in the mirror] always a bit of a shock... [M18-44]

As argued in chapter 4, for some women the self and the mirror image remain unreconciled and irreconcilable even in deep old age, as an 80 year-old female participant illustrates:

... I got up one morning.... and lo and behold it was absolutely dreadful I looked in the mirror and I though flippin' 'eck you know...[F16-80]

F16-80's shock at being confronted by the reality of her ageing appearance suggests that this is a defining mirror moment; there may also be a sense of her need/desire to disbelieve the mirror, but the force of her negative evaluation is articulated using upscaled language, 'it was absolutely dreadful'.

5.1.2 The mirror as a cultural lens

Participants focus their self-evaluation primarily on the face as the immediate object of their continuous monitoring and self-surveillance (see Twigg 2003), investing it with a kind of metonymic significance, so that it comes to symbolise the changes wrought by the process of ageing on the body as a whole:

... I remember when I first noticed the lines under my eyes and I must have been maybe in my early 30s.... I looked in the mirror and I thought ((sharp intake of breath)) I've got lines I'm getting old I'm getting old.... [F8-45]

F8-45's narrative shows the significance she attaches to the face and its relationship to the appearance as a whole and by extension to her self-identity as she makes the evaluative leap from 'I've got lines' to 'I'm getting old'. The nature of her reaction to what she sees in the mirror - her sharp intake of breath indicating an almost visceral shock – reveals the extent to which cultural discourses construct the face as the site of women's 'symbolic capital' (Coupland 2003: 127). These external expectations of femininity and beauty have inscribed the mirror in which she evaluates her ageing appearance on a daily basis. The reactions of most female participants to what they see in the mirror are driven by the power of these cultural discourses; Furman states that 'the aging female body comes into deep conflict with cultural representations of feminine beauty...' (1997: 5) and data analysed for this study suggests that this is equally, if not more true for the face. In the following extract, a 23 year-

old female participant describes the changes she is already observing in her skin:

... I know I'm only 23 but you do... you notice the areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly now you just think when should I start looking after my skin and like it's interesting that I even think ... like it's a definite decision that I will go into the whole anti-wrinkle cream thing....
[F2-23]

The sense of obligation contained within the modal 'should' indicates that F2-23's self-evaluation is being conducted in the context of cultural voices which dictate that there is a time to start 'the whole anti-wrinkle cream thing' before the changes she notices in her face place her in conflict with these external expectations. Another female participant, this time from the mid-life cohort, articulates the tension between the problematic ageing female body and the cultural conflation of youth and beauty:

... you look in the mirror and you see a different you know you don't feel any different inside... you become less happy with how you look I don't want to have wrinkles and have grey hair I want to be that young person that I used to be...[F7-44]

She negatively evaluates the reflection of her ageing face, 'you become less happy with how you look'; the verb of negative affect, ('I **don't want**'), signals her rejection of the visible signs of ageing she sees on her face which are implicitly evaluated as unattractive. By contrast, the verb of positive affect and the past construction 'used to be', express regret at the passing of her youth (see also 4.3 above).

The evidence of these women's experiences suggests that they may be far from alone in the self-evaluation of their mirror moments; almost without exception, participants of all ages negatively evaluate what they see reflected back, using a variety of linguistic devices such as negatively-loaded verb and adjective choices, adverbial markers of stance, intensification, and paralinguistic cues e.g.:

... I looked in the mirror and I thought ((**sharp in-breath**)) I've got lines I'm getting old
[F8-45]

... **I didn't like** the way my face was changing...[F13-56]

... **I don't want** to have wrinkles and have grey hair...[F7-44]

... it was **absolutely dreadful** I looked in the mirror...[F16-80]

... it **did worry me** that I had all these grey hairs...[F12-56]

It seems that what these mirror moments represent - and reflect - is the continuous struggle of identity construction taking place at the intersection of the personal mirror and the cultural mirror as these participants attempt to navigate the requirements of the 'feminine self' (Furman 1997: 50), the ageing self and the weight of cultural and personal expectation.

Compare Coupland's (2013) study of the role of the mirror in the 'self-consciously age-emancipating environment' (2013: 20) of a dance studio in which, despite this liberating context, she reports that her participants remained 'frequently aware of the potentially repressive ideology of mirrored old age' (ibid).

5.1.3 Linguistic construction of the mirror moment

A number of features characterise the language participants use to describe the conflict and ambivalence they feel in such mirror moments:

Surveillance

Mental process verbs as defined by Halliday (1985, Halliday and Matthiesson 2004) are particularly apparent, these construe 'the flow of events taking place in our own consciousness' (2004: 197); thus the verbs of awareness, surveillance and scrutiny recurring in their accounts suggest an internal rather than an external process of evaluation:

'I **notice**'

'what do I **see** I **see** the lines of age'

'when **you look** in the mirror'

'**you look** in the mirror and **notice** something'

Participants articulate an inner-directed perceptual journey beginning with an examination of their image in the mirror, expressed by verbs of seeing ('see', 'notice', 'look'), moving to acknowledgement of the changes ('realize', 'think'), and finally to evaluation, expressed by verbs of (negative) affect, ('I didn't like', 'I don't want') which realise attitudinal stance.

Pronoun shifts as distancing and alignment strategies

Participants frequently make use of pronoun shifts to express different degrees of engagement³⁸ with what they are evaluating (see chapter 3 and 4.2.1 above), signifying complex changes in alignment with regard to their mirror image, most commonly involving the movement from 'I' to 'you', often within the same clause or stretch of discourse:

you look in the mirror and **you** see a different...**you** know **you** don't feel any different inside...**I** don't want to have wrinkles...[F16-80]

³⁸ 'Engagement' as explained by Martin and White (2005) construes the domain of appraisal concerned with the construction of stance and attitude (see Appendix I, see also chapter 4 for its application to the analysis).

This linguistic strategy may perform a number of functions in the discourse, e.g. as a distancing mechanism designed to achieve a measure of emotional distance from an uncomfortable reality:

... when **you're** at 60 there's no question **you are old** there's nothing **you can look** in the mirror...[F14-64]

In their work analysing gender and the language of illness (which, as discussed in chapter 4 has significant parallels with ageing), Charteris-Black and Seale refer to the use of more impersonal pronouns such as 'you' and 'it', as 'deictic distancing', arguing that 'some pronouns distance the speaker from the entity discussed and contribute to a more 'objective' or impersonal discourse style' (2010: 63). Whilst it cannot necessarily be argued that such pronoun use signifies a whole speech style for these participants, the fact that they switch between the impersonality of 'you' and the personal ownership of 'I' suggests the need for a kind of selective engagement. This is not the only function served by the shifting use of 'you', however. Many participants use the personal pronoun to describe the initial act of noticing the changes in their own faces, signifying the intimacy of this personal act of recognition, of what Charteris-Black and Seale term 'the world from the speaker's lived perspective' (ibid) e.g.

... **I** sort of looked at my parting...

... **I** notice my skin changing...

... **I** see **I** see the lines of age...

then often switching to 'you' as they describe the act of looking in the mirror e.g.:

... **you look** in the mirror and you see...

... when **you look** in the mirror...

This may indicate another function of this pronoun, which is to 'represent the world from the perspective of another' (Charteris-Black and Seale 2010: 63) so that there is a dual aspect to these complex changes in perspective: the first uses 'you' in an objective, depersonalised way to suggest that acts such as looking in the mirror are things that people in general do - possibly a normalising strategy for behaviour which is so freighted with cultural judgements that it is often a source of guilt. The second may be an acknowledgement of the external gaze, symbolised by the mirror, for which the face is evaluated and prepared:

... I want to look in the mirror and think I look ok y'know **I'm ok to go out with this face**...[F5-38]

The absence of a possessive pronoun, (**this** face'), suggests F5-38's detachment from, and objectification of, her own face.

Deconstruction and depersonalisation

For all individuals in this study, the act of looking in the mirror is also an act of deconstruction. They disassemble their faces, focusing on individual parts as separate entities, in something of a reversal of the Lacanian moment of unity before the mirror e.g.:

... what do I see I see the **lines of age** that are there I see **the bits** I've had done **the bits** I haven't had done....[F12-56]

... I've noticed you know you notice **the areas** that sort of get a bit wrinkly...[F2-23]

... I could have done another A'Level if I for all the time I spent with the mirror looking at y'know I can see it there's much less [hair] here than here and then **these bits** going...
[M18-44]

This evaluation-through-deconstruction is a linguistic manifestation of the fragmentation of the self discussed in 4.2.4 (above). Here, the face is characterised as a collection of specific, separate parts: 'the bits', 'the areas', 'these bits'. The generic, impersonal vocabulary makes this not only an act of deconstruction, but also one of depersonalisation. The face has become objectified linguistically but also symbolically, as it takes its place alongside other 'bits' that need fixing. Furman notes the same tendency in the participants in her study as they assess photographs of themselves, a phenomenon she relates to the wider discourses of the beauty and cosmetic industry:

what these women have in common is their identification of a body part as insufficient, inadequate.... or otherwise unacceptable. The recurrent tendency to break their image apart reproduces advertising's propensity to isolate female body parts in order to sell merchandise that will improve or make desirable that part needing servicing... (1997: 57).

Judith Williamson (1978) in her classic analysis of the workings of advertising goes further, describing how parts of the female body are appropriated by advertisers and through this transaction acquire the status of objects which are then sold back to consumers in the form of an idealised image. The consequence, as Williamson argues, is that 'we are both product and consumer' (1978: 70). This view of the face-as-object is manifested lexically as shown above, and also grammatically by use of definite articles instead of possessive pronouns e.g.:

... **the** lines around here ((gestures to eye area))...

... **the** lines of age that are there...

... **the** areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly...

... **this** face...

Two seemingly contradictory approaches to the face sit alongside each other: the process which deconstructs the face in order to evaluate it, and the metonymic status which is simultaneously conferred upon it. The ageing face is most often the catalyst for this apparent paradox, but other areas of the body are not exempt:

... the texture of the skin and the toning of it and it's predominantly **from the knee up for me I feel... that's the first sign of old age** and I don't like it...[F10-49]

These extracts illustrate the complex nature of individual lived experience; day-to-day in front of the mirror specific parts of the face and body are identified and evaluated separately rather than as part of a whole, whilst at the same time being held to account as representative of the whole.

5.2 The gendered mirror

5.2.1 Evaluating the ageing appearance

... but even now I get irritated 'cos I feel my stomach's not what it used to be...[F17-80]

... I'm grey but yeah that's at least I've got grey hair and I'm not bald but if I was bald y'know there's not a lot you can do about it is there ((la)) if that's the way you're gonna go...[M19 53]

Gergen and Gergen's (2000) analysis of autobiography concludes that the body plays very different roles in the development of male and female identity (see chapter 2), a conclusion supported by analyses undertaken in this study and illustrated by the two extracts above which typify intrinsic differences in the ways in female and male participants inhabit their bodies. For female participants, the significance of the physical signs of ageing is intimately connected to the importance attached to appearance; F17-80's comment shows that her awareness of her appearance as well her dissatisfaction with specific parts of her body remains undiminished with age; the temporal reference with which she frames her comment ('even now') indicates her lifelong commitment standards of appearance. Even at 80, and having given birth to five children she is still irritated that 'my stomach's not what is used to be', thereby reflecting the power of cultural discourses which associate the ageing female body with weight gain (i.e. post-menopause), representing a further deviation from the cultural model of femininity in which slimness=youth=beauty. However, it seems that the men in the study have a different relationship with the mirror, as exemplified by M19-53's

comment (see above) which suggests an evaluative context constructed around physical acceptance ('there's not a lot you can do about it is there ((la))') rather than dissatisfaction and anxiety.

The cultural context within which women evaluate their appearance at any age, but particularly *as* they age, is shaped by powerful discourses which problematise the female body, especially the ageing female body (see Furman 1997, Twigg 2013, Bordo 1993, Wolf 1991, see also chapter 2); however for women at both ends of the age spectrum their evaluative starting point is what Bartky terms the 'deficient body' (1990: 29). The relationship between a woman's appearance, the ageing process, and cultural standards requires complex navigation; as Furman observes, 'the "to-be-looked-at-ness" nature of a woman's experience prepares her to be ever at the ready for being observed' (1997: 54) and F17-80's dissatisfaction shows this is a lifelong concern. However, one of the younger female participants comments:

... I do feel like my skin looks a bit grey sometimes and I guess it is kind of more like (.) yeah there's more that can go wrong on a woman ((la))...[F1-21]

At 21 she has already absorbed three key messages: that her skin is already in need of work in order to meet the required standard (and is therefore to be negatively evaluated); that dealing with imperfections is an expected part of the problematic nature of the female body and of performing femininity; and that this is more the case for women than for men, ('there's more that can go wrong on a woman'). These are the taken-for-granted assumptions she carries forward in her process of identity development and from which her evaluative infrastructure is formed. By contrast when the younger male participant (aged 44) describes assessing his appearance in the mirror, his evaluation of the physical changes he notices (e.g. fine lines around the eyes) is the product of a different age ideology:

... what I feel... sort it out get more sleep or um kind of well you must have drunk too much last night 'cos you don't look like that normally surely... [M18-44]

Whilst subject to some of the same self-surveillance, his instinctive reaction is nonetheless to ascribe the evidence he sees in the mirror to lifestyle factors (too much alcohol, not enough sleep) but not to ageing. He evaluates the changes in his appearance as short-term problems which can be 'sorted out' and the series of exhortations he delivers to himself, 'sort it out', 'get more sleep', express this underlying attitude; it can all be solved by a quick fix solutions-based approach. Coupland's (2003) study of the gendered nature of advertising in the

skincare market argues that the ideological context within which men evaluate their appearance is very different compared to that of women³⁹ (cf. analysis in chapter 6 of this study). Whilst aware of the need to look after his appearance to some degree, ('I moisturize after I shave'), M18-44 has not been subject to the same discursive conditioning as his female counterparts. He and the other male participant are not nonchalant about the signs of ageing they observe in themselves, but they take their place in a different hierarchy, determined by a view of the body not as the problematic site of anxious self-scrutiny, but as a generally efficient and aesthetically acceptable mechanism which needs relatively little maintenance to function as required. It is worth noting, however, that amongst younger males (e.g. aged 18 to 25) attitudes to appearance may be changing with the growth of the male grooming market, a trend increasingly picked up in media commentary⁴⁰. Tracking how younger males evaluate their appearance as they age alongside those of the 20-something female participants in this study may be a suitable subject for further investigation, but is beyond the scope of the present study.

5.2.2 Female narcissism and the gaze

For women in this study, the relationship with the mirror is demonstrably problematic. The mirror itself is both the instrument of self-examination and the lens of society's gaze, for which the outer self must be prepared; this highlights a complex set of pressures which as Sontag argues, afflict women far more than they do men:

Women look in the mirror more frequently than men do. It is, virtually, their duty to look at themselves – to look often. Indeed a woman who is not narcissistic is considered unfeminine' (1972, (1978): 77).

There are many examples of what Meyers terms 'the visual culture of feminine narcissism' (2002: 106) which encode collective ambivalence surrounding women and mirrors; one contemporary example in the cultural mainstream is the 2012 film 'Mirror Mirror' based on the fairy tale of Snow White⁴¹ in which the mirror is the vehicle for the evil queen's quest to cling on to her youthful beauty. However the same cultural discourses which establish feminine narcissism as a requirement, also judge it negatively as being indicative of the

³⁹ Although the L'Oreal brand's 2013 campaign featuring Hugh Laurie as the ambassador for their 'Men's Expert Vitalift' skincare product suggests that the anti-ageing discourses more traditionally associated with the female skincare market are also starting to be applied to the male market.

⁴⁰ e.g. 'Oh Boy, it's the Adonis complex' *The Sunday Times* 15/9/13

⁴¹ Based on 'Snow White' by the Brothers Grimm, directed by Tarsem Singh

‘stigma of vanity and triviality’ (Meyers 2002: 124) associated with the stereotype of female preoccupation with appearance. As Davis comments, ‘[a] woman who cultivates her appearance is damned-if-she-does and damned-if-she-doesn’t’ (1995: 45). Subliminal awareness of this cultural double-bind may underlie the comment of this 38 year-old female participant:

... I very often leave in the morning I’ve not looked at myself in the mirror once yeah because I get up really early to go to work ((la))...[F5-38]

Although balancing a demanding career as a paediatrician with caring for three young children, F5-38 clearly still feels the need to justify the fact that she often does not check her appearance in the mirror. She constructs this behaviour as slightly shameful, almost deviant, using subtle linguistic cues: ‘I’ve not looked at myself in the mirror once’, where ‘once’ serves to emphasise the lack of attentiveness to her appearance; the connective ‘because’ establishes cause and effect, and offers an explanation of what could be construed as a failure of her feminine duty; finally her laughter may work as a paralinguistic cue to deflect her embarrassment.

A 36 year-old female participant describes how her relationship with the mirror has changed over time:

... I remember when I was like 16 17 years old always looking in the mirror always making sure y’know but now I can go the whole day and I know I don’t look right but I’m just here to do a job I don’t have to look like a million dollars...[F4-36]

Her repeated use of ‘always’ emphasises the constant presence of the mirror, the verbs of checking and monitoring (‘looking....making sure’) conveying the sense of insecurity and need experienced by her 17 year-old self. Her next clause, ‘now I can go the whole day and I know I don’t look right’, indicates a more secure sense of identity which has developed with maturity and is less dependent on the mirror image, suggesting that she is able to subordinate aesthetic standards to her professional identity (‘I know I don’t look right but I’m just here to do a job’). There is, however, in her use of the phrase ‘I can go the whole day’, an echo of discourses of dependency and addiction which, together with the implicit suggestion of self-denial recalls recent news coverage of the phenomenon known as ‘mirror fasting’, exemplified in this extract from an article in the *Daily Mail*:

Women fed up with the constant pressure to look good are embracing a new trend – ‘mirror fasting’.

They are trying to avoid the obsession with youth and beauty by not looking at their

reflections for anything from a few days to a year.

(Tamara Cohen, *Daily Mail* online, 19 August 2012 | Updated 21 August 2012)

Through her lexical choices the author creates an attitudinal starting point which assumes that women are inherently narcissistic and preoccupied with appearance ('the **obsession** with youth and beauty'). Her own evaluative stance is more opaque; the use of the distancing 'they' suggests that she does not include herself within that community of women and possibly encodes a negative evaluation both of the women who give in to 'the constant pressure to look good' and those who attempt to resist it through mirror fasting. Such authorial ambivalence leaves unresolved the question of whether mirror fasting offers freedom from the enslavement of the gaze or thralldom of another kind. The result is that complex and conflicting messages are sent out concerning stereotypes of feminine vanity and the conflation of (female) identity with appearance, mediated by the mirror, which even when it is denied, serves to perpetuate the vanity of women. F4-36 and F5-38's comments illustrate how these messages are internalised and brought to bear on their own relationships with the mirror.

Cohen's article and the cultural context which has produced it raises the issue of what Meyers terms 'narcissistic agency' (2002: 120), that is, the extent to which women feel free and empowered to present themselves as they choose, rather than defining their appearance according to externally driven expectations. Gill theorises the notion of narcissistic agency in the context of the postfeminist shift in representations of women from passive objects to 'active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests' (2007: 258). She sees this shift, which is fundamental to understanding what she terms the 'postfeminist sensibility' as also a shift in terms of the operation of power; 'a shift from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze' (ibid). According to her argument this shift is particularly pernicious in that it represents a deeper form of exploitation than the historical objectification of women. Much as Berger (1972) argues (see below), Gill opines that 'the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form new a disciplinary regime [which] constructs our very subjectivity' (ibid). It is therefore difficult for participants in this study to articulate a simple answer to the question 'who do you want to look good for?', particularly in the context of

cosmetic surgery (see section 5.4) as illustrated by this 23 year-old female participant's somewhat convoluted response:

Interviewer: so if you were to have it [sc. cosmetic surgery] done, who would you be doing it for for whose gaze

[F2-23]: that's a very good question (.) well I think it's actually primarily for myself but it's about because I'm we've been doing all these personality assessments and apparently Ivery much define myself by what I perceive as the opinions of people around me.....so if I define myself by what other people think if I had plastic surgery I'm doing it for myself but it's my own perception of what other people think [F2-23]

John Berger (1972) argues that women are culturally conditioned to prepare themselves for the male gaze:

men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (1972: 41).

Data in this study seems to suggest, however, as Gill observes, that whilst the pressure of the male gaze remains, the female gaze is changing, its judgement intensifying, so that many female participants appear to enforce cultural standards regarding the ageing appearance far more ruthlessly than the men do, an evaluative double-standard observable in participants' often paradoxical and contradictory relationship with the media.

5.2.3 Public discourses of ageing and the changing female gaze

Participants demonstrate a high level of awareness of cultural attitudes to ageing, particularly as expressed in media discourses, and continuously position themselves with regard to these powerful public voices through subtle evaluative shifts, expressed linguistically through constantly changing alignment/disalignment strategies. There seems to be a consensus that cultural attitudes to ageing are fundamentally gendered, as the following extracts exemplify:

... women are I would say um written off quite early on ((la)) men can be um men can age I guess are allowed to age more gracefully and can be sexy... [F8-45]

... I think it's been a well proven case that the judgement of women who age from a beauty perspective is much higher.... because the cliché is that men get dignified women get old and I think that's how it's seen... [F11-54]

The passive constructions used by both F8-45 ('women **are written off** quite early') and F11-54, ('I think **that's how it's seen**') suggest an apparently objective appraisal of anonymous external attitudes which characterise women in general as passive, powerless recipients of these judgements. By contrast, in drawing a distinction with how men are regarded, 'men **can age** I guess **are allowed** to age more gracefully', F8-45 makes a semantic

adjustment from the modal ‘can’, signifying ability and capability, to the much stronger ‘are allowed to’, suggesting permission conferred. The juxtaposition of these two clauses may indicate that in her view this permission is denied to women by society’s standards. It is unclear, however, whether F8-45 and F11-54 include themselves in the community of women they are describing, but the lack of agent (that’s how **it’s seen**) emphasises remoteness from the originator of the viewpoint, and F8-45 and F11-54’s own disengagement from it. They may be using these linguistic devices to signal non-membership of the group of women who are ‘written off’ in this way by allowing themselves to be the objects of the cultural gaze, still understood to be predominantly male; Twigg describes the current cultural environment, especially as it views young women, as ‘constituted oppressively in an omnipresent male gaze’ (2013: 4). Berger (1972) argued that throughout history women have been culturally conditioned to prepare themselves for the male gaze; what is interesting in the accounts of F8-45 and F11-54 is the way in which they appear to be positioning themselves as the surveyors of other women - a role traditionally attributed to men - but more particularly as the surveyors of *older* women. Elsewhere in her account F8-45’s comments that:

... I guess I’m not really that representative of society... because I work I’m y’know I take care of myself... the majority of the population the majority of women do not take care of themselves properly after a certain age they don’t think it’s that important um once you reach I dunno what age it is 40 for some women 50 for some women you let yourself go...[F8-45]

This complex stretch of discourse illustrates the fluid nature of the judgements of the female gaze. In the negative evaluations inherent in her references to women who ‘do not take care of themselves properly’ and ‘let themselves go’, F8-45 herself appears to dismiss large sections of the female population and to align herself with the same disapproving societal voices she has previously referenced, (‘women are I would say um written off quite early on’), perhaps exemplifying Fairclough’s contention that ‘opacity is the other side of the coin of naturalisation’ (2010: 30, cf. also 3.2.1 above). This is a profoundly contradictory position in which she expresses an implicitly negative evaluation of cultural standards which she sees as disadvantageous to women, but which at the same time she seems to espouse in forming her own judgements. These complex and conflicting evaluative perspectives continue when participants consider the question of how society judges appearance:

... women **are supposed** to be pretty young things...[F10-49]

... women **are expected** to be kind of smooth and beautiful...[F8-45]

... yeah I do think **they’re judged they’re judged** far more on their looks [M18-44]

There appears to be a common view amongst both male and female participants that ageing women are judged differently/more harshly than men, and that these judgements are primarily rooted in aesthetic standards. The passive constructions ('are expected to be', 'they're judged') suggest a perception of society as a remote, anonymous and genderist entity. However, it could be argued that whilst articulating what they see as the gendered nature of society's aesthetic expectations, the extracts above show the female participants reproducing the language of gendered stereotype ('pretty young things', 'smooth and beautiful', 'men.... get dignified') without overtly evaluating it, although it could perhaps be argued that such deliberately stereotypical phrases contain an implicit negative loading. As discussed above, their stance as speakers remains opaque; the use of 'women' i.e. 'they' rather than the inclusive 'we', emphasises the absence of personal engagement; linguistically this appears as a detached commentary on a status quo which they do not overtly reject and may even accept, but which they don't appear to apply to themselves. These extracts suggest genuine ambivalence on the part of these participants concerning their perception of cultural standards of appearance and their personal stance towards them; what emerges, however, is the centrality of appearance to collective evaluations of ageing. Moreover, it is significant that despite evidence of their uncertainty and conflict regarding cultural expectations of them as women, none of the female participants is prepared to step outside the cultural script of ageing. This evaluative double-standard is especially apparent in participants' often paradoxical and contradictory relationship with advertising media, particularly discourses concerned with the (ageing) appearance as expressed in anti-ageing skin care advertising. Many participants reveal an emotionally charged and conflicted attitude towards this domain of the media and its messages, in which rejection ('the Garnier one with Davina McCall is disingenuous...totally airbrushed so don't have any belief in that at all' [F7-44]) sits alongside desire to conform ('I spend money on skincare you know I buy Clarins... I don't buy a lot of it but I think maybe I should' [F8-45]). Powerful cultural imperatives coalesce in F8-45's comment 'I think maybe I **should**', where the modal expresses her sense of pressure to conform to aesthetic requirements embedded in these advertising discourses despite the cynicism all participants express about their effectiveness. It is difficult therefore to view F8-45's choices of skincare products as genuinely agentic; the seeming paradox of 'narcissistic agency' and the complex work undertaken by advertisers in positioning and appealing their consumers is analysed in detail in chapter 6.

This analysis shows a complex discursive environment in which female participants of all ages occupy complicated attitudinal stances, poised both emotionally and linguistically between rejection and desire: rejection of idealised representations of women which characterise most anti-ageing skincare advertisements (see also chapter 6), and which they see as being imposed upon them, and desire at some level and to some extent to conform to cultural expectations of beauty and femininity encoded there. For all participants, monitoring and scrutinising their appearance for the signs of ageing is embedded in the texture of everyday life. The evaluation of their own and other people's appearance is a complex process, intensified by ageing, involving continuous measurement and assessment against the notion of a "standard" which originates in the widely accepted idea that there is a "right" and a "wrong" way to age. The linguistic construction of this evaluative yardstick gives a further insight into how participants apply these standards and therein, seemingly, lies another double-standard: such judgements appear to be applied more stringently to women *by* women than they are by women to men - the surveyed female has also become the surveyor.

5.3 Constructing standards: "right" and "wrong" ways to age

... there is some grey [sc. hair] and I also think it's you know when you have a 20 year-old and a 17 year-old towering over you you can't you don't pretend you're an age you're not and in my work it doesn't worry me I'm the age I am... [F9-48]

... I'd do anything frankly yeah no I would I would definitely if I felt because I mean it's back to pressure on society because you want to look good to feel good in yourself so I think physical appearance is very important...[F10-49]

Twigg writes that 'reflexive self-scrutiny has created an environment in which the body and its changes become the focus for acute attention' (2003: 61); furthermore pervasive public discourses which continue to problematise the ageing female body and idealise the youthful body mean that participants in this study, confronting the physical changes in their bodies, must accommodate age and the physical reality of ageing within their sense of self-identity, a process which involves constructing a personal stance on ageing, based on a notional spectrum of resistance and acceptance, and a way of talking about it. The above extracts from two 40-something female participants exemplify two radically different positions on ageing: F9-48 establishes her stance as one of acceptance, bordering on a disregard, of age/ing

(...‘you can’t you don’t pretend you’re an age you’re notin my work it doesn’t worry me I’m the age I am’). Her choice of ‘pretend’ with its connotations, particularly negative in this context, of fakery, lack of authenticity and self-delusion, gives an indication of how she might view those who attempt to resist ageing by disguising its signs. Her changing appearance (‘there is some grey [sc. hair]’) but also the presence of children who are clearly young adults (‘a 20 year-old and a 17 year-old towering over you’) are evidence of the futility - as she sees it - of resistance to the inevitability of ageing; her choice of ‘towering’ may also connote the power of the presence of youth which can not be denied and which ultimately overpowers age, literally looking down upon it. By contrast F10-49’s position is one of resistance almost at any cost (‘I’d do anything frankly yeah no I would definitely...’); as discussed in 4.1.1, F10-49 makes this comment in the context of the discourse of acceptance she seemingly espouses throughout her narrative, perhaps suggesting that this is the authentic voice of her subjective identity. Both F9-48 and F10-49 use the second person pronoun (‘**you** can’t **you** don’t pretend’, ‘**you** want to look good in **yourself**’) perhaps indicating a heteroglossic perspective (see Appendix 1), i.e. an acknowledgement that the attitudes they express are part of a more widely accepted view which is unquestioned and taken for granted. In suggesting that acceptance is the only honest and credible response to the inevitable reality of ageing, F9-48 implicitly disregards the imposition of external standards of appearance. For F10-49, however, resistance in the form of investment in her appearance is presented as a cultural requirement which she both experiences as a ‘pressure’ but which is also the means by which she achieves her own desire to ‘look good’.

The linguistic resources F9-48 and F10-49 employ, formed by notions of the “right” and “wrong” way to age, connect cultural standards with the construction of individual stance. Thus F9-48’s use of modality (‘you can’t’) to signify lack of possibility, suggests that the only path is to deny and dismiss cultural expectations by accepting ageing, whereas F10-48’s choice of a verb of positive affect (‘you want’) signifies her deep desire to meet cultural expectations through resisting ageing. Writing about the complex nature of individual responses to the process of bodily ageing, Twigg argues that the notions of resistance and acceptance are themselves highly problematic:

... the process and meaning of resistance is itself deeply ambivalent.... It remains paradoxical in its usage... what constitutes resistance and what capitulation is often far from clear. How does age resistance differ from age denial? (2003: 63).

It could be argued that the idea that there is a right and wrong way to age is a modern myth as Roland Barthes defines it, in which a cultural discourse embeds in the collective consciousness, acquiring over time the status of a truth which masks ‘the ideological abuse which... is hidden there’ (Barthes 1957: xix). Nonetheless, this is a cultural construct which all participants in this study appear to have internalised and which is reinforced by the visual and discursive environment of their daily lives. Thus for the women in this study and, it could be argued, for the wider population of women, beauty continues to be regarded as synonymous with youth, which is in turn presented as the prerequisite of feminine success. It is impossible to avoid the cultural focus on appearance even if the response is to deny its validity, as exemplified by F9-48 (see above); the pressure this generates positions women as ‘surveyed’ (Berger 1972: 41) by the cultural gaze but also as ruthlessly, by their own subjective gaze. Not only that, the competitiveness for the acknowledgment of the ‘gaze of the Other’ (Bartky 1990: 27) which according to Furman (1997) is part of the feminine psyche, means that, as already discussed above, the surveyed woman is also increasingly the surveyor of other women.

This complex evaluative lens sharpens its focus with the process of ageing, moving constantly along the (highly nuanced) spectrum of judgements which determine “right” and “wrong” ageing. Analysis of interview data in this study has yielded some recurring patterns of evaluative language, present in all participant accounts, in the form of the fixed and semi-fixed expressions ‘ageing gracefully’ and ‘mutton dressed as lamb’ which participants use to map this evaluative territory; e.g.

... I don’t think she’s [sc.Hillary Clinton] had many facelifts... so I think I would say she’s **aged gracefully**...[F14-64]

... no I’d be too scared it[sc. cosmetic surgery] would go wrong I’m much more a person I’d rather find a way of **ageing gracefully** [F7-44]

... for me I think don’t look like **mutton dressed as lamb** that’s something I would worry about (...) because I like to look fashionable but I don’t want to look like **mutton dressed as lamb**...[F15-75]

The prosody in these extracts shows that ‘ageing gracefully’ (which also incorporates the idea of ‘naturalness’) is used as an encapsulation for positive evaluation of ageing, whereas ‘mutton dressed as lamb’ together with its synonym ‘trying too hard’, marks the opposite end

of the evaluative spectrum as the realisation of the wrong/inappropriate way to age. The presence of these expressions in the data, the commonality of their usage, is significant in terms of what is revealed about the attitudes encapsulated in them; every participant instinctively calls on one or the other in attempting to delineate the territory of in/appropriate ageing and articulate the complex judgements represented by either position. Fairhurst's (1998) study reports similar findings, noting that the ways in which participants deal with their own ageing 'are the keys to assigning people to the categories of either 'mutton dressed as lamb' or 'growing old gracefully' (1998: 262). Furthermore, the finely balanced nature of these evaluations is widely reinforced in media commentary, as this extract from an article by the journalist India Knight illustrates:

The question of mutton – or the fear of being perceived as muttonish – preoccupies all my girlfriends, though not as much as the fear of seeming prematurely aged (*The Sunday Times Style Magazine*, 25th November 2012)

As discussed in chapter 7, such articles reinforce the perceived social penalties of too much/not enough resistance to ageing by discursively framing both states in terms of 'fear'. What is particularly striking is the 'age ideology' (Gullette 1997: 9) which has produced the language Knight chooses to frame the dilemma as much as the dilemma itself; thus the grotesque and damning connotations of the 'mutton(ish)' metaphor (i.e. meat which is old and tough and has ceased to be tempting or appetizing), inspire a dread which is comparable to that of simply being perceived as ageing. The more fundamental point, however, is the gendered nature of these expressions. Evidence from data in this study suggests that as linguistic encapsulations of cultural judgements they are uniquely female, applied only *to* women (this is particularly true of 'mutton dressed as lamb'), almost exclusively *by* other women. The taken-for-granted place of these expressions in the collective consciousness and their seemingly unchallenged genderist nature is a further indication of the different evaluative context which women and men inhabit with regard to their appearance, and which generates the standards which structure their evaluation mechanisms.

5.3.1 Standards as mechanisms of evaluation

... we all know what he [sc. Barry Manilow] **should** look like I guess at 65 but that's not 65 is it...[M19-53]

... the fact that you could say I'm very average is not a good starting point.... **standard does get lifted** when I see normal people y'know aka the thought I was a supermodel last night y'know it was just 'cos **the standard was so low**...[F11-54]

The word ‘standard’ appears frequently in participants’ talk; as these extracts show, the notion of standards encapsulates the complex evaluative infrastructure through which participants construct an attitudinal stance, and is expressed through a variety of linguistic strategies: for example indirectly as in the use of the modal ‘should’ in M19-53’s extract or more directly, as in F11-54’s narrative. Furman writes that the habit of self-evaluation against external norms enters the female consciousness at an early age as girls become aware of ‘conformity to peer group standards and practices’ (1997: 49). As these extracts illustrate, this evaluative lens is constantly shifting, changing focus from an external to an internal perspective (‘you could say **I’m very average**...and **that standard does get lifted** when I see normal people...’), as participants absorb norms and expectations generated by the wider discourses of society and assimilate them at a personal level.

The standards participants use as reference points can be grouped for analytical purposes according to these different evaluative perspectives: *externally-driven, internally focused* (i.e. standards absorbed from media/advertising discourses); *internally-driven, internally focused* (i.e. originating in an individual’s own self-evaluation); and *internally-driven, externally focused* (i.e. personal standards by which individuals judge others):

(i) ‘*The gaze of the Other*’: *externally-driven standards, internally focused*

A 54 year-old female participant describes her anxieties about her 23 year-old daughter:

... maybe if we go back to the A [sc. daughter] question is this what has formed her standard that she’s judging herself against and if I thought about that... it would make it up my list of things I worry about...[F11-54]

Whilst F11-54 negatively evaluates the beauty ideals embodied in these discourses, seeing them as particularly harmful to younger women, (‘it would make up my list of **things I worry about**’), it seems that she may not apply the same thinking to herself:

... I think about my behaviour and my skirt length as I get older.... I think about what I wear because I wouldn’t want to be... mutton dressed as lamb...[F11-54]

Her references to ‘behaviour’ and ‘skirt length’ are an implicit acknowledgement of the standards which dictate how the appropriacy of both should be measured, and what is at stake if either of these is misjudged – the (public) censure contained within the expression ‘mutton dressed as lamb’ (see above). F11-54’s daughter articulates her own relationship with external standards:

... in theory I think cosmetic surgery's a bad thing and that we should all be happy with who we are and have this inner self belief... but it's kind of like a double think at the same time I hold equally true to believe that I actually... I want to meet society's definition of beauty and I want to fit into that.... [F3-23]

At 23 she is already experiencing the complex relationship which seemingly exists between many of the female participants and 'society's definition of beauty', i.e. the externally generated discourses which determine external requirements for the ageing female appearance. For F3-23, the conflict seems to lie in the desire to meet the standard, ('I want to fit into that'), whilst resenting its imposition, and at the same feeling an internally-driven pressure towards self-acceptance. This conflict is linguistically expressed in the use of the modal 'should', ('we **should** all be happy with who we are'). Its presence in the accounts of many participants indicates the commonly felt difficulty of reconciling the needs of the different dimensions of identity with the pressures of the 'fashion-beauty complex' (Bartky 1990:39).

There is a fundamental contradiction inherent in the positioning work of many female participants in relation to external standards; they represent both the lure and pressure of conformity to a publically endorsed standard. However, despite negatively evaluating these external standards, none of the participants is prepared to step outside them; there are a number of examples in the data of individuals' ability to construct an attitude to their own ageing appearance out of two seemingly contradictory viewpoints. The following extract is from a 44 year-old female participant:

... unfortunately because I've worked for a beauty care company I know that there's a lot of crap in some of these adverts... there's not much that cream can actually do and so I actually don't believe in a lot of these ads...[F7-44]

Her negative evaluation is clear from her initial framing with the adverbial marker ('unfortunately') together with her choice of lexis, ('crap') and her intensified negation ('so I **actually** don't believe...'). In the same stretch of discourse, however, she enthusiastically describes a range of skincare products she has recently started using:

... now I discovered a **fabulous** product last year it's Liz Earle and it's all natural ingredients and ... I've been **very very happy** with that...[F7-44]

F7-44 seems unaware of the contradictions inherent in the attitudes she is expressing, or that her description echoes the language of skincare advertising she has previously denigrated; ('a fabulous product... all natural ingredients...'); this is all the more significant given that she

has worked in beauty and cosmetic companies for many years. The fact that she continues to be a consumer of skincare products despite her evident cynicism suggests that (even) she remains deeply susceptible at a level beyond the reach of her rational thought processes, to the pressures of ‘the gaze of the Other’. A 44 year-old male participant provides another illustration of the coexistence of cynical evaluations with the personal desire to hedge bets:

... I haven’t been influenced by it [sc. anti-ageing advertising] I have quite often looked at this stuff and thought should I shouldn’t I and then d’you know what I use moisturizer after I shave...can I be arsed to buy the other stuff to put round my eyes ... [M18-44]

and then:

... bloody you know ice cool eye roll on I mean I kind of question I mean the new L’Oreal stuff you know if that really makes a difference then maybe...[M18-44]

His initial unhedged statement of dismissal, (‘I haven’t been influenced by it’), is qualified by his subsequent use of the modal ‘should’, ‘I have quite often looked at this stuff and thought **should I shouldn’t I**’, which reveals his awareness of external discourses of body maintenance, and by implication a sense of wider culturally constructed standards of appearance. His deliberate dysphemism (‘can I be **arsed** to buy the other stuff...’), constructed as a rhetorical question, appears even more dismissive of the pressures these discourses might attempt to impose, whilst at the same time leaving open the possibility that there might be products/regimes of maintenance worth investing in.

This is a complex issue; almost without exception female participants willingly engage in a variety of beauty and cosmetic practices in their everyday lives, seemingly undertaken as active and conscious choices, even as they critically evaluate the public voices which exhort them to carry out these regimes. Perhaps one observation to be made is that contradictions inherent in the way women in this study position themselves vis-a-vis external standards are irrespective of age but a product of the ageing process. Whilst they are aware of pressures to conform, as data extracts have demonstrated, body-work is also a vehicle to wellbeing and self-confidence; as Furman comments, ‘... the pursuit of beauty and body improvement is a vehicle to women’s power’ (1997: 63). The force of participants’ negative evaluations of the visible signs of ageing they observe in themselves suggests that whatever discourse of self-acceptance they seem to espouse, however strong their rejection of external standards, as has been noted above, none of them is prepared to transgress the boundaries they represent.

(ii) *The personal gaze: internally-driven, internally focused standards*

When evaluating themselves, several participants reference their perception of their own aesthetic starting point, as exemplified by a 54 year-old female participant:

... I think that I am uncommonly accepting of how I am so I think that I look average I think I've always looked average and I've always been you know somewhat overweight and that's always been kind of fine...[F11-54]

Although this assessment is made with external standards as the reference point, this is an internally-driven standard which originates in her own view of her appearance. She describes herself as 'average', reinforcing this self-perception with the temporal perspective contained within the word 'always', ('I think that I look average **I think I've always looked average**'). She expresses this (repeated) assessment in relatively dispassionate terms and there is a marked absence of language features such as intensification which would signify emotional intensity. F11-54's description sits within her own contextual frame of being 'uncommonly accepting', and alongside her reflection that externally-driven standards might put a different construction on her self-assessment:

... where does the standard come from (.) I don't know I suppose if you come at it and you say well the fact that I think I'm very average is not a good starting point so you could say that's a bad standard that's a standard created by the media...[F11-54]

The language of her self-evaluation is a 'cumulative motif' (Martin and White 2005:19) through both extracts as she juggles her awareness of internal and external standards and the different evaluative perspectives they represent. She uses 'you' to indicate unspecified external voices which pass comment on her assessment of herself as 'average', ('if **you** come at it and **you** say well the fact I think I'm very average is not a good starting point'). The same unspecified external voice goes further in (potentially) condemning this as a 'bad standard', although the use of the modal construction 'you could say' together with the hypothetical framing of the clause ('**if** you come at it and you say...') emphasise the speculative nature of her comment. She seems to be playing with the notion that her personal definition of 'average' may differ from an externally created standard, but given her speech style, her repeated use of 'I think' ('**I think** that I look average') may be an expression of rational evaluation rather than the epistemic status of the comment, as Palmer (1979) argues. This suggests the primacy of her own internally-driven standards over externally generated ones.

An 80 year-old female participant offers a different perspective; as a young woman growing up in a patriarchal family where men were considered to be superior she recounts her role in the family narrative as the ‘stupid’ one who would survive on the strength of her personality and her attractiveness, a categorisation which has shaped her self-evaluation as a mature woman:

... I think I’ve felt more equal since I’ve been 50 because before I had such a hang up that it was only because I was physically attractive that men really liked me....[F17-80]

Furman writes that ‘women’s developing sense of their bodily selves is strongly shaped by the way they are perceived by others’ (1997: 51), arguing that this often sets up a lifelong pattern of competition and comparison with others which sometimes results in feelings of inferiority. Denied the opportunity to develop herself in other ways, F17-80 defined herself in terms of her physical attractiveness. It is only since embarking on her own career at the age of 50 (and coincidentally reaching the menopause at the same time) that she realizes the extent to which this has been the case (‘I think I’ve felt more equal since I’ve been 50...’). Her physical attractiveness has had an ambivalent impact on her sense of self in that it has been an impediment to her sense of confidence in herself as a person (‘it was only because I was physically attractive that men liked me’), but at the same time has defined her internal aesthetic standard to such an extent that even as an 80 year-old woman she continues to subscribe to discourses of body maintenance, disclosing that for some years she has regularly undergone a regime of non-surgical face-lift treatments:

... but it was years before I conf- I still feel guilty now about doing it.... you know indulging spending that money just on so that I can go on looking you know younger which I’d rather look...[F17-80]

Her language conveys a strong sense of shame. Her unfinished word (‘confess’) is juxtaposed with ‘guilty’; together they express her powerfully negative judgement on her own actions, positioning them in the realm of sinfulness. Both her guilt and justification arise from the same conflicting motivations: she feels the need to maintain her appearance, having been defined by it for much of her life, and the pressure to maintain her own aesthetic standard for the external gaze, embedded within her sense of self, is a lifelong concern. At the same time she is aware of the issue of age-appropriacy, in that her actions might elicit disapproval from others, but her desire nonetheless to conform to a standard of attractiveness drives her quest for youthful-looking skin, even though she questions its appropriateness for a woman of her age. Furman writes of ‘the search for attractiveness’ (1997: 51) as being one of

the forces governing the development of female self-perception. She further argues that as a consequence women

aim to become objects of male desire not subjects themselves [...] this tendency is not limited to women's youthful years but continues to affect the time and attention they devote to their physical appearance throughout their lives (ibid)

This is borne out by F17-80's narrative, as well as those of other older female participants.

By contrast the older male participant operates within an evaluative context which allows him to assess his own appearance very differently:

I would say... that we've still got it we as a group of guys we go out occasionally into town and we socialize... and it's still nice to go out and you put your suit on... then I guess it's a little bit of flirting but it's nice to y'know see that ok well I have still got it [M19-53]

M19-53's choice of the phrase 'I've still got it' contains a sense of confidence in his appearance which is also bound up in a feeling of sexual confidence ('I guess it's a little bit of **flirting**') which is not only undiminished by age (he is 53), but as he describes earlier in his account, may have become more powerful with age. Based on the analysis so far, it would be difficult to envisage a similar level of confidence in any of the female participants, whatever their age.

(iii) *The self as 'the gaze of the Other': internally-driven standards, externally focused*

In their judgements of other people, female participants frequently appear to position themselves as the external evaluative lens, the surveyors of other women (see 5.2.3 above), a process which involves a complex and often contradictory conjunction of internally and externally-driven standards. One manifestation of this is a difference in the use participants make of evaluative standards, seeming to apply a different standard to other people from the one they apply to themselves. A 45 year-old female participant is discussing a close female friend who has had cosmetic surgery:

... and then the third one that had them done did have incredibly loose and saggy breasts... she also had her teeth done and her breasts done um so y'know they're still my friends I still love them but there's something about it that disappoints me um I can't judge people on my own standards so back to your original question have I considered it [sc. cosmetic surgery] yeah y'know we talk about who's going to have botox first... [F8-45]

Appearing unaware of the contradictions in her account, F8-45 negatively evaluates her friend's decision to have cosmetic surgery ('there's something about it that disappoints me'); her use of the judgement-loaded 'disappoint' belies her statement that she does not intend to be judgemental. Furthermore, in laying claim to the disappointment personally ('disappoints

me') she positions herself as the external arbiter, the 'gaze of the Other' (Bartky 1990: 38) whilst not discounting the possibility of cosmetic procedures for herself, 'I have considered it'. Orbach (1986) comments that the female gaze is fiercest when turned upon itself; this analysis suggests that the gaze of women is even more unforgiving when turned on other women. A more extreme example comes from a 56 year-old female participant who is being asked to assess a series of images of older high profile/celebrity women, but amongst which is an image of an "ordinary" older woman:

F13-56: ...well I think this person's [sc. "ordinary" woman] completely irrelevant doesn't look like she's done anything except have a family don't know who she is

Interviewer: so she's irrelevant in what way

F13-56: I don't think she's ever made anything of her life or had any independent career nothing that defines her as herself she's always be defined by somebody's daughter somebody's wife somebody's mother somebody's grandmother

Interviewer: what makes you say that when you look at her

F13-56: well if it's nowadays she's let her hair go grey....

F13-56 appears to take the woman's appearance as an indicator of her character and worth, ('well I think this person's **completely irrelevant** doesn't look like she's done anything except have a family...'). Using language which is much more intensified than elsewhere in her account she constructs a strikingly negative evaluation of the (imagined) life choices and achievements of this unknown woman based solely on the semiotics of her unadorned, wrinkled face and grey hair, in which negative constructions follow each other ('**doesn't** look like, '**don't know** who she is', '**nothing** that defines her'), challenging her worth as a person, apparently because she has given into the process of ageing and not made an attempt to conceal its most obvious signs, ('well if it's nowadays she's let her hair go grey') thereby failing to meet F13-56's standard of what a successfully ageing woman should look like. Thus F13-56, like F8-45 in the previous extract, positions herself as the critical external eye on another woman's appearance. However it is not only the severity of the female gaze which is striking but also its gendered nature, as already seen in 5.2.3 above. This is from another

mid-life female participant:

it's fine if a lady comes to you with a man they're both 56 right the guy you look and you think ok maybe grey hair maybe not it's fine then you look at the woman who doesn't wear any makeup doesn't pluck her eyebrows or do anything she just looks awful [F12-56]

The ruthless and uncompromising nature of F12-56's evaluation of the hypothetical woman ('she just looks awful') is more than the 'revulsion inspired by the unimproved female body' (Furman 1997: 60); what is being judged is a failure of feminine duty to invest in the appearance ('doesn't wear any makeup doesn't pluck her eyebrows') and thereby compensate for the visible signs of ageing which by contrast are deemed to be acceptable for the hypothetical man in F12-56's account, ('they're both 56 the guy...you think ok maybe grey hair maybe not it's fine...').

These extracts reveal an evaluative double-standard operating on several levels: a woman's ageing appearance is judged more ruthlessly than a man's by other women as well as by men; cosmetic surgery and its effects are strongly negatively evaluated in other people but justified and accommodated at a personal level (see section 5.4) which may in part be driven by the competitiveness referred to by Furman:

... the attention women get from all quarters – teachers, family, friends, and men – depends in large measure on how their bodily appearance stacks up in comparison to others: real people, professional models, and media images of femininity' (1997: 52).

This same competitiveness may be a factor in the hardening of the female gaze (see 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 above) whereby women, increasingly the surveyors of other women, at times even perpetuate the gendered evaluations of wider culture which 'denounce[s] women with special severity' (Sontag 1972, (1978): 73). In the current cultural context pressures on women to look good are more, not less intense and evidence from these individual accounts suggests that female participants experience these pressures day-to-day in ways which have a discernible impact on how they evaluate their own ageing appearance in relation to a complex and fluid network of evaluative perspectives: the personal gaze, the cultural gaze, the female gaze as surveyor and surveyed, the youthful gaze, the male gaze. Furthermore, it appears that these women have, to a greater or lesser extent, developed complex mechanisms of justification which allow them to accommodate the conflicting demands of their own desires both to conform to, and to seem to reject, external standards. Such conflicts are often highlighted by the strong feelings evoked by the issue of cosmetic surgery.

5.4 Cosmetic surgery: acceptance, resistance and denial

... if you have botox and you have beauty products and you're seen to do all of those things then you're seen to be vain if you don't do them then typically you're going to be unkempt...[F10-49]

Davis argues that individual stances on cosmetic surgery are often formed from 'ambivalence and ... unease' (1995: 13); this extract from a 49 year-old female participant encapsulates the dilemma and dualism of personal - and culturally driven - attitudes towards cosmetic surgery, in which the pendulum of collective judgement can swing from accusations of vanity 'if you're seen to do all of those things' to judgements of 'moral laxitude' (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 178) for *not* doing them. At the same time cultural focus on appearance means that cosmetic surgery is a highly salient, as well as polarising issue for all participants in this study, highlighting diverse ideological positions and eliciting strong emotions and opinions. For some, cosmetic surgery appears to have significance beyond its literal status, as this extract from a 45 year-old female participant illustrates:

... it's [sc. cosmetic surgery] just not natural why would you put bits of plastic inside your body to make your breasts bigger that's so superficial...[F8-45]

Lexical juxtapositions, ('not natural', 'bits of plastic', 'superficial') express her physical and moral distaste; the commonality of such views amongst other participants suggests that cosmetic surgery may act as the catalyst for a complex conjunction of discourses relating to appearance, ageing, embodied identity, and gendered cultural stereotypes concerning (female) beauty and narcissism. Many participants seem to hold fundamentally ambivalent views about cosmetic surgery, uneasily situated somewhere between expressions of rejection and desire, and which, as discussed above, form part of the more generalised narrative of conflict and contradiction constructed around appearance. One of the influencing factors in participants' attitudes may be the ambivalence of much lifestyle media commentary on cosmetic surgery⁴², which drives the complexity of individual attitudes; even amongst participants who have had cosmetic surgery, or expressed an intention or desire to do so, motivations and justifications are wide ranging and often contradictory. Furthermore, when participants evaluate other people, the issue of cosmetic enhancement is the single most commonly occurring reference point in their judgements and assessments. Analysis

⁴² Grazia Magazine's article *Goodbye Pillow Face, Hello 'No Trace'* (March 2010) provides an example of such media dualism; readers are invited to judge celebrities who have had obvious cosmetic surgery ('pillow face') and those who may have had more subtle interventions ('no trace face'). The implication is that the former is trying too hard, whilst the latter is in some way cheating by being hard to detect.

identifies some common language patterns through which participants express complex - and shifting – strategies of alignment/disalignment as they construct an evaluative stance.

(i) Distance and depersonalisation

I actually think it's very sad that women feel they need to go down the plastic surgery route well even men feel they need to go down the plastic surgery route 'cos it's dangerous it's mutilation.. [F7-44]

I personally have no objection to it but I suppose most of my friends they don't lie and they don't have the frozen look...[F9-48]

These articulations position cosmetic surgery as an abstract idea which makes no personal call on F7-44 and F9-48; their evaluative stances are expressed through mental process verbs such as *think* and *believe*, and phrases of quasi-formal agreement and approval, ('I ... have no objection, I approve of it') which present even relatively extreme views ('it's dangerous it's mutilation') as the result of rational and dispassionate thought processes. Other participants' accounts provide a range of less personally vested evaluative positions signaled by the use of 'you' used as a distancing mechanism (see discussion in 5.1.3 above): i.e. a narrative of acceptance which seeks to normalise cosmetic surgery ('just another tool in **your** makeup box' [F11-54]); a means of achieving inner wellbeing through physical enhancement, ('I think if **you** want to make **yourself** look better and feel better do it' [F12-56]); a tool which can be seen as working with rather than against the power of nature; ('if done well it can only enhance what nature gave **you**' [F12-56]).

(ii) Self-justification

When participants consider cosmetic surgery in more personal terms, their language use often contains mechanisms of (complicated) justification. F10-49 has repeatedly expressed a personal doctrine of self-acceptance and dislike of airbrushed images of women which for her, have no expression or personality:

these [sc. models in L'Oreal ads] are Stepford⁴³ wives... there's no expression there's no personality that comes across [F10-49]

She subsequently admits to having had botox:

Interviewer: ...I'm interested that... you've recently had botox which smooths out expression lines

⁴³ The reference is to a 1975 science fiction thriller by Brian Forbes, based on the 1972 novel by Ira Levin

F10-49: er that's true because I think that um but I don't actually it's more than I would have wanted actually I would like to have it so it gets rid of the frown line but not necessarily gets rid of expression....'cos I just think when you get this bit here between your eyebrows it can just make you look grumpy...

F10-49's heavy use of hedges and hesitations indicate her deep discomfort at the apparent contradictions in her attitudes; she attempts to justify her actions by creating a distinction between frown lines (unacceptable) and expression lines (allowable), whilst framing her decision within the wider context of cultural pressures on appearance:

... I mean it's back to pressure on society because you want to look good... so I feel physical appearance is very important...[F10-49]

This is an instance of what Davis, in her exploration of the dilemma of cosmetic surgery, describes as (t)he contradictory lures and oppressions of femininity' (1995: 63) which, she goes on to argue,

can be experienced as "ontological shocks" – that is disjunctures between a woman's values and beliefs and her practical or lived consciousness of being-in-the-world, between how she thinks she *should* feel and how she *does* feel (ibid).

This disjuncture characterises the accounts of many participants, even those who have actually undergone some kind of cosmetic intervention, who nonetheless linguistically frame the experience in a way which indicates awareness of the possibility of negative external judgements. The fact of having had cosmetic surgery - however unrepentantly undertaken – is treated as an admission:

... not the knife I've **only** had fillers and botox...[F12-56]

... I've had botox.... my friend **when I split up with G** [sc. boyfriend] who does botox **said have it on me** dear...[F10-49]

These extracts exemplify the careful linguistic framing of the disclosure, either via some sort of explanation, often in the form of a narrative, ('when I split up with G...'), or minimising device ('I've **only** had fillers...'). Even participants who straightforwardly embrace cosmetic surgery appear to feel compelled to offer some kind of justification, albeit couched as in the extract below, in the functional language of routine body maintenance:

... I have inherited bags under my eyes getting deeper circles... what is wrong with me that I have not prioritized getting that taken care of so it's eminently pragmatic...[F11-54]

For all of the women in this study, whatever their stance on cosmetic surgery, and however seemingly accepting of themselves, their starting point is that of the 'deficient body' (Bartky 1990: 29); as Davis states:

(w)omen relate to their bodies as objects – not as sex objects for others – but rather as objects of work, as something to be improved, fixed, or transformed (1995: 62).

Bartky further argues that the pressures of ‘the fashion-beauty complex’ (1990:41) - the highly structured, embedded and inescapable presence of the beauty and cosmetic industries in society - drive women to

an estrangement from her bodily being....she must exist perpetually at a distance from her physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval... (1990: 40).

As already discussed, this posture of disapproval, experienced in varying degrees by all female participants in this study, becomes for some a powerful motivation behind their decision to have cosmetic surgery.

(iii) Judgement

When participants assess and comment on images of other people, cosmetic surgery is almost without exception the foremost mechanism of (unprompted) evaluation. The linguistic realisation of these judgements shows a complex set of attitudes towards cosmetic intervention in others which is often inherently negative, even amongst participants who have had surgery themselves, as if Bartky’s posture of disapproval is turned outwards rather than inwards. These coalesce around a number of evaluative stances in which participants position themselves as ‘the gaze of the Other’ e.g.:

“The shameful secret”

... and she **doesn’t deny** she does botox all these things...

... she looks fantastic she **owns up** she says yeah I’ve had it done...

... so long as **you don’t notice it** as soon as you notice it then why did you do it . . .
there’s such a sort of **vanity thing** that comes through . . .

The negative prosody in these extracts is expressed through the language of guilty secrets and confession (‘doesn’t deny’, owns up’). Verb choices associate cosmetic surgery with a kind of shame at being discovered in an act of vanity and in doing so locate the views of these participants within the broader landscape of the cultural dualisms (‘as soon as you notice it then why did you do it’) in which ‘a woman who cultivates her appearance is damned if she does and damned if she doesn’t’ (Davis 1995: 45).

“Pretence”

... it's like John Cleese having a hair transplant... why try and **pretend** that the ageing process isn't happening...[M18-44]

... she's had something done **but** it's quite natural...[F5-38]

These extracts show the influence of a number of external discourses. Lexical choices such as ‘pretend’ situate cosmetic surgery within the domain of artifice, self-delusion and dishonesty, whilst the connective ‘but’ carries an implicit negative comparison between ‘having something done’ and ‘naturalness’ which by contrast is assumed to be the desired state. The message is clear; in evaluating artifice and pretence as inherently unacceptable, cosmetic surgery as the instrument of such deceptions is negatively evaluated by association.

“Denial and self-delusion”

... he's **fighting it** [sc. ageing] rather than going with it... he's obviously had so much surgery **it's ridiculous**...[M19-53]

This extract exemplifies a commonly held view amongst participants that cosmetic surgery is an intervention which can take resistance too far. The factors influencing this evaluation process appear to be concerned with the degree of obviousness of the surgery, and the age and possibly gender of the recipient (the extract above refers to the singer Barry Manilow, aged 71). In this instance M19-53's judgement is that cosmetic surgery has fallen on the wrong side of acceptable resistance so that it has become a denial of the reality of ageing. There is an added implication that it is considered more inappropriate for a man undertaking cosmetic surgery - a domain more traditionally associated with female vanity - in that it transgresses traditional conceptualisations of heteronormativity; consequently M19-53's evaluation is strongly negative (‘it's ridiculous’).

The extreme nature of some of this linguistic positioning shows the extent to which cosmetic surgery remains a problematic and unresolved issue for many participants; their attitudes and judgements are complex and often contradictory, perhaps the more so as a result of powerful media discourses (see chapter 7)⁴⁴. Analysis raises a number of issues: the significance of cosmetic surgery as a reference point in the evaluation of other people, and the generally

⁴⁴ Another example can be found in the relentless, negatively-loaded media speculation about Renee Zellweger's apparently radically altered appearance (*Express* online 22nd October 2014), matched only by her attempts to deny that it is due to cosmetic surgery.

negative or ambivalent evaluative loading conferred upon it; its presence as a qualification even in the context of a positive evaluation, (e.g. 'I still think she's [sc. Twiggy] lovely whatever she has or hasn't had done...'); and the rarity of the influence of any genuine counter-discourses in participants' accounts. It is clear that for many individuals in this study, much as Davis concludes from her research, cosmetic surgery is regarded as a 'morally problematic' (1995: 162) undertaking which requires justification. Davis also argues that 'cosmetic surgery is not about beauty but about identity' (1995: 163); as indicated by analysis undertaken here, as well as being morally problematic for the individuals in this study, cosmetic surgery and the complex positioning work conducted around it, act as a catalyst for more fundamental considerations about the nature of the feminine self and the place of 'beauty' within it, its relationship with the ageing self and the role of both in the construction of identity. Hurd Clarke and Griffin's (2008) paper gives an additional perspective on the role of beauty work (i.e. cosmetic surgery) in women's responses to ageism. They conclude that for the women in their study 'their ageing appearances were pivotal to their experience of ageism' (2008: 653) and that furthermore their recourse to cosmetic surgery was more fundamentally about 'the fight against invisibility' (ibid), and that maintaining social visibility was contingent on maintaining the appearance of youthfulness by (surgically) effacing the signs of ageing. Davis states that cosmetic surgery is 'the cultural product of modernity and of a consumer culture which treats the body as a vehicle for self-expression' (1995: 17). As an act of physical intervention, it sits discursively between medical, technological and cosmetic domains and its power to alter the body materially, not just visually, may account for the guilt and need for a certain covertness shown by some participants. For participants in this study who have had cosmetic surgery or who intend to do so, it is a deliberate act which all claim is 'for me', although as suggested by Hurd Clarke and Griffin's study, the presence of external judgements and standards is a deeply significant factor for all individuals, whether explicitly acknowledged or unconsciously implied. Indeed it seems that for many women there are few moments lived outside this 'gaze of the Other', however the 'otherness' is constructed.

Thus for all participants in this study there is a sense of the body as 'a task, an object in need of transformation' (Bartky 1990: 39) although the scale of the task may vary. Bartky's notion of the 'deficient body' is an attitude which begins in the second decade of the lifecourse and

remains a lifelong concern, and is frequently the trigger for the decision to have cosmetic surgery. Participants may have different views on what constitutes physical imperfection, but focus on the body, cultivation of the appearance and the element of narcissism inherent within it, are common aspects of these women's sense of self. All are concerned to some degree 'to meet the cultural requirements of femininity' (Davis 1995: 41) however critical they are of these norms, and all define their femininity in relation to these norms, particularly as they age. Whilst participants who have had/intend to have cosmetic surgery claim it as an agentive choice, the question remains as to whether this choice represents genuine empowerment or is in fact a kind of 'pseudo-liberation' (Giddens 1991: 107). Davis, in attempting to resolve this dilemma as a feminist, suggests that for many women cosmetic surgery involves a sort of female agency in which 'bodily imperfections provide the opportunity for action' (1995: 60), enabling women to become 'an embodied subject rather than an objectified body' (1995: 114), and to feel that they are able to lay claim to their own bodies - a view supported by the experiences of many participants in this study. Analysis suggests that participants do not construct their feminine self around an idealised notion of beauty, but rather a standard of acceptability which is related to their sense of their own aesthetic starting point (see 5.3.1 above); many reference enhancement and 'making the best of what you have' in which personal desire and cultural duty are intertwined. The notion of 'making the best of myself', closely related to the discourse of 'not letting myself go', features prominently in participants' justifications not only for cosmetic surgery but for continued investment in their appearance as they move through the lifecourse. Cosmetic surgery, increasingly viewed as a tool in this process, has become more strongly identified with resisting ageing (cf. Hurd Clarke and Griffin's study, see above) which may partly account for its prominence as a reference point in participants' evaluations of other people. There is evidence from the data that many participants assume that a beautiful (older) woman will have 'had some help'. If the effect is natural, this is positively evaluated, if too obvious it is judged negatively as signifying too much resistance - amounting to denial - of ageing. The dualisms inherent in these evaluations are symptomatic of the wider ambivalence with which the media views the ageing female body. Despite the fact that cosmetic surgery is increasingly normalised in contemporary society, in its intimate relationship to notions of selfhood and femininity, it remains for the women in this study 'a complex and dilemmatic situation' (Davis 1995: 67).

5.5 Summary

These two chapters have focused on the relationship between ageing, femininity and appearance. Woodward writes that ‘in our mass-mediated society, age and gender structure each other in a complex set of reverberating feedback loops’ (2006: 163); analysis of the experiences of four female participants (see 4.3 above) shows that the feminine self and the ageing self do exist in a complex relationship, based both on continuity and change. The data also suggests that the ‘invention of the feminine self’ (Sontag 1972, (1978): 79) which begins in girlhood, is a determining factor in the age identity participants construct over time. Furthermore, there is a relationship of co-dependence between age and gender identity which could be translated literally as ‘the sort of girl I was has determined the older woman I am, and the old woman I intend to become.’ Woodward writes of Western culture’s preoccupation with ‘the appearance of the body as the dominant signifier of age’ (1991: 10); the data in this study indicates that appearance is also the dominant signifier of the feminine self, the vehicle through which this aspect of gender identity is constructed, evaluated and expressed, and the site where the balance between feminine self and ageing self is negotiated. As analysis has shown, although female participants may have different relationships with their bodies, the way they inhabit and evaluate them both shapes and is shaped by how they choose to express their femininity; this relationship in turn directly shapes their attitudes to ageing. Through their narratives, something of the complexity involved in the process of performing ageing femininity as part of day-to-day lived experience can be understood. Whilst youth and age remain positioned as polar opposites by many of society’s public discourses (see chapter 2), the private voices of these participants reveal more personal and nuanced interpretations of these binaries, related to the subtle accommodations made by each woman as the feminine and ageing selves intersect. For these individuals, the ‘micro events’ (Fairclough 2010: 38) of maintaining a balance of age and gender identity as they age must take place within the ‘macro structure’ (ibid) of contradictory – yet exacting - cultural ‘rules’ concerning appropriate performance of ageing femininity.

The analytical focus moves from the private voices of individual experience to public discourses of ageing in chapters 6 and 7, via a selection of texts which in different ways, are important sites for the construction and dissemination of age and gender ideologies. Chapter 6 examines cultural attitudes towards the ageing appearance as expressed in a range of anti-

ageing skincare advertisements, whilst chapter 7 looks at the wider domain of media discourses of ageing.

CHAPTER SIX: PUBLIC DISCOURSES (I): AGEING IN SKINCARE ADVERTISING

6.0 Introduction

As discussed in 5.2.3 above, many female participants hold complex attitudes towards the media in general, and anti-ageing skincare advertising in particular. The purpose of this and the following chapter is to explore further the relationship between private and public voices - so central to this study - by examining in depth a range of public discourses. This chapter uses analysis of a range of anti-ageing skincare advertisements to address research question (iii) (see chapter 1), investigating how these advertising discourses represent and talk to (ageing) women. Some comparative analysis of male-targeted advertisements is also undertaken, which starts to address research question (iv) by considering what cultural insights may be gained from comparing representations of women versus men in such texts. The analysis uses Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) system of visual grammar as the analytical framework (see chapter 3) for the examination of how visual and textual elements are used to encode ideologies concerning age and gender, and how the consumer/reader is consequentially positioned by the advertiser.

6.1 Market overview

The global personal care market is currently valued at \$300 billion, having recovered momentum following the 2008/9 recession, and an annual rate of growth of 4.5% is forecast (Nikola Matic, Kline and Company, source: In-Cosmetics Marketing Trends online presentation, April 2013). The market intelligence company *Euromonitor International* identifies a number of global trends of relevance to my study: skincare remains the dominant category in personal care in terms of size and predicted growth (\$16.3 billion by 2016), and facial care is expected to account for 86% of the total skincare market; the anti-ageing skincare category is growing in importance, intensifying competition between brands and retailers. One likely consequence will be even greater focus on innovation in this category, notably product ingredients (e.g. stem cell innovations, use of the sub-dermis fat layer in skin rejuvenation) and technology in the form of anti-ageing devices (e.g. sonic skin devices such as L'Oréal's 'Clarisonic') (Nicole Tymon, *Euromonitor International*, *GCI Magazine* September 2012, online version). However consumer trend analysis within the anti-ageing

sector indicates that the market may be out of step with consumer need; Imogen Matthews's report 'Older Women: The Forgotten Demographic' (2012) suggests that whilst women aged 45+ spent £2 billion on cosmetics and toiletries in 2011, there is widespread scepticism amongst this age cohort regarding anti-ageing product claims as well as lack of engagement with the younger models featured in skincare advertising.⁴⁵ Matthews adds that 'skincare brands should focus on providing skin comfort and moisturising and drop anti-ageing claims. They should use less aggressive language such as pro-ageing or healthy ageing' (source: In-Cosmetics Marketing Trends online presentation, April 2013). Other commentary endorses these findings; Marc Beasley, author of the report 'Marketing and Mature Audiences' (2012) states that 'older women, it seems, are less concerned with looking younger, as seems to be assumed by the cosmetics industry, and more concerned with looking healthy and feeling comfortable' (source: In-Cosmetics Marketing Trends online presentation, April 2013).

6.1.1 Brand Overview

L'Oréal Paris and Lancôme

Both L'Oréal Paris and Lancôme are owned by a French parent company, The L'Oréal Groupe, which has a wide portfolio of brands segmented to target different audiences, pricing points and distribution channels. L'Oréal Paris is the company's mass-market skincare brand whilst Lancôme targets the growing premium or prestige market sector, and is generally only available in specialist stores. Unlike some of its competitors, The L'Oréal Groupe has chosen not to diversify, maintaining a relatively narrow focus on beauty and personal care and within that on the skincare sector; indeed much recent innovation has been focused in this area. Both brands have seen significant research and development investment in the anti-ageing sector, with the launch of L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Laser X3 and Lancôme's Genifique Yeux Light-Pearl. The pressure to innovate brings controversy, however. In 2012 The L'Oréal Groupe received a warning letter from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) concerning the nature of the anti-ageing claims on some Lancôme products which use language considered to be overly pharmaceutical such as 'boost the activity of genes' (Michelle Castillo, CBS news online, September 12th 2012). Nevertheless, through a continuous innovation programme and careful targeting of their product ranges, both L'Oréal Paris and Lancôme

⁴⁵ This trend is borne out in the 2004 study commissioned by the Dove brand, into women's attitudes to beauty and wellbeing; 'The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report'

appear to accommodate a relatively wide consumer target in terms of age span, from women aged 20s - 50s (source: *Euromonitor International*).

Clarins

The Clarins brand, owned by a family-run French company, has become an international group. Its founder, Jacques Courtin-Clarins, built the brand on dermatological expertise developed in the Clarins Laboratories and took it into the high-end beauty sector with a proposition which remains close to its white-coated origins - scientific expertise based on natural /plant-based ingredients. Clarins is market leader in prestige beauty care in Europe (source: www.clarins.com) and although the brand has a relatively wide consumer base (25 – 50+), recent advertising (see 6.3 below) suggests that the brand is actively targeting younger consumers.

Estée Lauder

The Estée Lauder brand was launched in 1946 by Estée and Joseph Lauder as a premium beauty and cosmetics brand, targeting women aged 30+. Whilst the brand continues to rank in the top ten global beauty and cosmetic brands (source: *Euromonitor International*), some commentators⁴⁶ suggest that the brand's position is under threat in two ways: its core consumers are ageing with the brand whilst younger consumers are not being recruited; and as the skincare market becomes ever more segmented, the brand's slightly fuzzy science/beauty offer is being eroded by brands with more clearly focused propositions.

6.2 The ambivalent consumer

As discussed in 2.1.3 above, the media-as-mirror confronts women of all ages with a series of ideal representations of femininity which become more difficult for women to navigate through the process of ageing. Consequently, as data in this study shows, participants' reactions to advertising and their behaviour as consumers is often conflicted and contradictory; the nature of these responses can be more deeply understood within the context of postfeminist media culture (see Gill 2007, see also 2.0 above). Although such contradictions are visible in the language they use, this is often not acknowledged by them, as

⁴⁶ e.g. McAfee et al, 2005, online version, source: www.mcafee.cc/Classes/BEM106/papers/2005/EsteeLauder.

exemplified by a 45 year-old female participant who is describing her reactions to a skincare advertisement from the Garnier brand:

... they're talking about the science they're trying to blast blast people with research I would maybe look at seeing you know if they'd done a test well they've only done 72% of 150 women I'm sorry that's not impressive for me if they said they'd done a million women... then I would probably go out and buy it...[F8-45]

F8-45's verb choices ('look at seeing', 'go out and buy') encode discernment and agentic choice, reinforced by her unhedged dismissal ('that's not impressive for me') of what she sees as flimsy claims, further emphasising the positioning she has constructed for herself as a canny consumer who sees through such pseudo-scientific product claims. However this stance is belied in the stretch of discourse which immediately follows, as she narrates her own history as a consumer:

L'Oréal yeah I've definitely used L'Oréal I've definitely used Garnier...I used it when I was a teenager until I think I went on to Clinique and then on to Clarins and I think maybe now I'm at a certain age...I should there maybe is another cream that I should go on to now... [F8-45]

The language of sequencing ('I went on to...and then on to...I should go on to now...') describes a continuous and dedicated experience of skincare consumption starting in her teenage years, in which different brands mark and accompany her transition from one lifestage to the next ('I used it when I was a teenager until ... I went on to Clinique and then on to Clarins...'), reflecting the personal relationship many participants feel they have with brands. It is clear that she regards her consumption journey as far from over as she approaches 'a certain age' ('maybe there is another cream I should go on to now...'), where 'should' (see 5.3.1 above) is an unconscious acknowledgement of her fundamental ambivalence as a consumer – common to many participants – in which resentment of the pressure of advertising and desire to conform to its messages, are equally powerful forces. Only one participant, a 54 year-old female who is a marketing professional, openly acknowledges the irrationality of her behaviour as a consumer:

... I love it [sc. advertising] all um why I think it gives me hope that I can beat it all I use all of these products and I don't think they make any difference ((la)) I mean I've never seen one bit of difference and I continue to buy them it is like this just bizarre cycle thank god I can afford it...[F11-54]

F11-54 also provides a unique dual perspective: as a marketer she employs an analytical lens on the workings of advertising whilst as a consumer she is able to draw on an awareness of

her own emotional relationship with the advertising message:

... I look at it [sc. advertising] and I go this stuff works it works on smart people like you and me y'know this very simple formula of promise of hope of scientific study beautiful women and it sells a lot of shit.... [F11-54]

The language of emotional engagement ('I love it... it gives me hope...it is just like this bizarre cycle...') sits discursively alongside the language of business analysis, ('this very simple formula'.... 'it sells a lot of shit') in a way which echoes Williamson's description of one of the functions of advertising as providing the consumer with 'formulae for emotions' (1978: 30). F11-54 is unusual both in her detachment and ability to deconstruct the messages of which she is also the target. The data suggests that for most participants, both male and female, the influence of advertising is complex; they are simultaneously evaluating advertising messages, working to construct a stance with regard to these external pressures and navigating a complicated and ambivalent set of attitudes as consumers. Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe comment on similar findings within their own empirical research carried out with consumers, leading them to 're-evaluate the consumer as a contradictory and ambiguous entity' (2006: 202).

In her classic analysis of how advertising works, Williamson argues that advertising has a significance beyond the obvious function of selling products, possessing '...another function which replaces that traditionally fulfilled by art or religion. It creates structures of meaning' (1978: 12). This, she argues, is brought about by the connection advertising creates between objects and people, in which values are assigned to objects and translated through the process of advertising into 'a set of values which have meaning for people' (ibid), engendering consumption patterns through which people 'classify, order and understand the world' (ibid); similarly Machin and van Leeuwen (2007) contend that this symbolic exchange between consumer and product is the basis of the lifestyle identities through which consumers construct self-identity.⁴⁷ F8-45's account of her own consumption patterns (see above) shows the link she makes between choice of skincare brand and lifestage as she attempts to deal with her own ageing process. A 23 year-old female participant gives an even more overt description of the relationship between consumption and her need to 'order and understand

⁴⁷ The notion of consumer driven lifestyles as the basis of identity construction in post-modern society is extensively explored in David Chaney's (1996) work *Lifestyles*.

the world':

I dunno you are more aware of sort of certain things as you get older and like I know I'm only 23 but you do I've noticed the areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly now you just think ooh... when should I start looking after my skin and like it's interesting that I even think when should I start like it's a definite decision that I will go into the whole anti-wrinkle cream thing...[F2-23]

F2-23's choice of language shows she is consciously navigating the complex process of constructing her feminine identity, already framed by her within the context of her ageing appearance ('I've noticed the areas that sort of get a bit wrinkly now'), balancing this with an acknowledgement of external expectations, contained within her use of 'should', which will define the consumption decisions of the next stage in her lifecourse ('the whole anti-wrinkle cream thing'). Talbot argues that such experiences are the result of the rise of 'consumer femininity' (2010: 138, see also 2.1.3 above), a force which shapes women's lives early on in the form of the 'material and visual resources they draw upon to feminize themselves' (ibid). Talbot contends that whilst consumer femininity may be a media construct, women are willing collaborators in the process, with consequences for identity development:

in participating in consumer femininity, a woman constructs herself as an object requiring work, establishing a practical relation with herself as a thing (2010: 167)

This argument is exemplified by F2-23's use of a detached and depersonalised word such as 'areas' to describe her skin. Her description supports Benwell and Stokoe's contention that the relationship which advertising creates and facilitates between consumers and products becomes 'the very material out of which we construct our identities' (2006: 168). For F2-23 skincare products are the transition markers to a different lifestage, acknowledged in the language ('it's a **definite decision** that I will go into the whole anti-wrinkle cream thing').

Baudrillard argues that as consumers, people are driven by the 'quest for differentiation' (1998: 61); however the interview data collected here suggests that these participants are driven by the desire to belong to consumption communities even as they struggle against their pressures. The relationship between participants' evaluations of skincare advertisements and their behaviour as consumers raises the question of agency: the extent to which as consumers, they are co-constructors of the process of advertising. Williamson argues that creation of meaning in advertising depends on the active collaboration of the reader/viewer, through a process she terms 'appellation' (1978: 44), in which readers/viewers are directly addressed by the advertisement and constituted as 'active receivers' of its message (ibid: 41);

by accepting the subject positioning it offers, the reader completes what Williamson describes as ‘the circuit of meaning’ (ibid: 40). According to her argument there is a fundamental paradox inherent in this process, however, produced by a phenomenon she terms the ‘alreadyness’ (ibid: 44) of advertising. The reader is addressed by the advertisement as if s/he were already its subject, summoned by a subject positioning based on the assumed intimacy of this ‘alreadyness of facts’ (ibid). The implication of Williamson’s argument, therefore, is that the active subjecthood and freedom of choice claimed by most participants in this study is an illusion, that in fact consumers are ‘freely invited to create ourselves in accordance with the way in which they have already created us’ (ibid: 42). Talbot also comments that ‘concepts, preoccupations and anxieties are presented as though they already exist in the readers’ daily lives’ (2010: 153).

Chapter 5 discussed the importance of appearance in the process of participants’ identity construction, and the influence of the external gaze on the private evaluations of participants’ “mirror moments” (see 5.1 above). Myra Macdonald writes that

the fear of ageing is stimulated by the glossy women’s magazines and driven by advertisers of the multitude of products claiming age-delaying or even age-reversing properties (2003: 195)

Similarly Diane Barthel, writing about women’s fear of age, comments that ‘much of the self-hatred engendered by advertisements is directed toward signs of ageing’ (1988: 141). In the context of culture’s preoccupation with ageing (see chapter 2 of this study) skincare advertising in particular has assumed a greater significance; as Coupland argues, ‘these texts become the locus of new discourses about ageing, culture, physiognomy, control and identity’ (2007: 39). The next section examines how gender and age ideologies are dealt with in the context of a range of skincare advertisements.

6.3 Analysis of skincare advertisements

The advertisements featured here reflect the broad profile of the UK skincare market and the dataset has been updated with the addition of examples from the most recent (2013/4) Boots and Lancôme campaigns, to ensure that current brand and advertising activity in this market is incorporated. As outlined in chapter 3, these texts have been selected because the discourses they present encode issues and preoccupations of significance for participants in this study, rather than as an attempt to provide a quantitatively valid dataset. As pieces of

advertising communication they also represent the communicative approaches of the major skincare brands and this illustrates the notion of the circularity of discourse which has structured the datasets (see 3.2 above). Thus the analysis will examine four discourses: anti-ageing as a gendered phenomenon; the problematisation of ageing early in the lifecourse; the role of the discourses of science in communicating ageing; and the emergence of ‘Love your Body’ discourses (Gill and Elias 2014: *passim*) (see 6.3.4 below) which appear to break category codes. These themes are used to address the following questions: what constructions of femininity and masculinity are communicated by these texts to the reader/viewer; what evaluations of ageing do they encode; and what subject positions/identities do they offer to the consumer.

6.3.1 Ageing as gendered: L’Oréal



Figure 1: 'L'Oreal Linda'

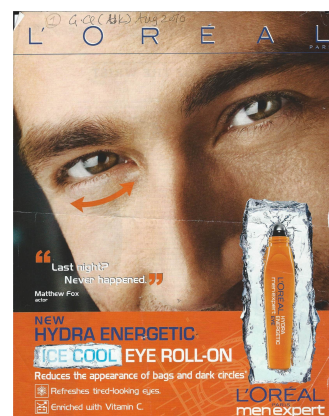


Figure 2: 'L'Oreal Matthew'

This comparative analysis examines how two advertisements, created within a consistent visual brand architecture and featuring broadly similar products, use semiotic resources to create different, fundamentally gendered communication strategies for their target consumer groups. Both advertisements incorporate two visual/compositional elements which typify L’Oréal’s advertising house style: a strong and consistently applied corporate branding structure, and celebrity endorsement. The female-targeted advertisement uses the supermodel Linda Evangelista to endorse its ‘Collagen micro-pulse eye correction system’ (see figure 1) whilst ‘Hydra energetic ice cool eye roll-on’ features the actor Matthew Fox and is aimed at a male audience (see figure 2).

Composition: real/ideal versus given/new

Machin (2010) describes how the positioning of different elements in a composition determines the relationship between them, creating an infrastructure of meaning for the text as a whole (see 3.2.4 of this study). Analysis of both L'Oréal texts shows that the strong compositional structure provided by the brand architecture is also an ideological construction. The L'Oréal brand name is given a very strong overall presence, appearing in three locations: at the top of each text, running across the full width of the space; in the bottom right hand corner as a smaller brand logo and on each prominently featured product shot. The visual dominance of the brand within the mix of other elements is undoubtedly the result of strategic marketing decisions taken by the brand owners; the immediate impact for the reader is that the communication of the advertising message takes place within territory delineated and clearly owned by the brand. The brand sign-off, 'You're worth It', used consistently across all L'Oréal's brand communication, is placed at the bottom of each text but given greater prominence in terms of size and position in 'L'Oréal Matthew', with an added strapline which reads 'The Future of your skin is in your hands. You're worth it'. This addition, and the way it is foregrounded in the composition is ideologically significant in that the phrase 'in your hands' ascribes agentive power to its male consumers in a way which is absent from the 'L'Oréal Linda' text. Susan Douglas, analysing the changing relationship between advertising as a reflection of cultural values and the notion of female narcissism, argues that 'the cult of narcissism' (2000: 270) reached a zenith in the 1980s and was encapsulated by the 'You're worth it' message. She writes:

Here we were again, same as it ever was, bombarded by the message that approval from others, especially men, means everything and without it you are nothing, and outcast, unworthy and unloved. We were right back to Tinkerbelle and Cinderella, urged to be narcissistic yet ridiculed if it was discovered that we were (2000: 270).

It is the voice of the brand which invites male consumers to take the future of their skincare into their own hands, linking active agency to self-worth and elevating 'You're worth it' beyond the passive narcissism associated with female consumption as described by Douglas, to the status of reward for (male) responsibility and endeavour.

In Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) system, compositions fall into two basic structures, which are accorded metaphorical values: one divides the space along a vertical axis, creating a left/right zone. The other divides elements on a top/bottom axis. 'L'Oréal Matthew' is a

one-page advertisement which uses the top/bottom structure: the top two thirds of the space is occupied by the model's face and the bottom third is given over to product information.

Kress and van Leeuwen designate the top part of a composition the 'ideal' zone, where aspiration, fantasy and the ideal are located. The bottom space is the 'real' zone in which what is factual, concrete and real is situated. Machin comments that

as with the given, in given/new compositions, it is in the ideal in top/bottom compositions that the underlying values of society are affirmed. So these are what we aspire to, what we want to be, or at least that which someone wishes to define as our aspirations (2010:146)

Placing the social actor's face in the ideal zone sends a message out to the reader that this is the culturally endorsed aesthetic standard to which they should aspire. However the fact that Fox's face shows expression lines, skin texture and fine wrinkles encodes a highly significant message regarding wider attitudes to male ageing and what constitutes an 'ideal' standard; visible signs of ageing are not problematic but acceptable - even desirable. This is a construction of ageing based on acceptance, even celebration, drawing on embedded cultural attitudes which associate status, power and gravitas with older men, and contrasts strikingly with the message contained within the 'L'Oréal Linda' advertisement. Here there is no overt textual reference to ageing, the product communication draws instead on the discourse domain of energy/sport nutrition rather than anti-ageing, (e.g. 'ice cool', 'hydra energetic', 'refreshes'). In this way the anti-ageing message is presented through inference, the signs of ageing framed as temporary effects of lifestyle choices like not getting enough sleep, which result in the euphemistically described 'tired-looking eyes'.

'L'Oréal Linda' is a two-page advertisement using the left/right compositional structure (see above). In identifying meanings for this structure, Kress and van Leeuwen draw on metaphorical associations such as the left to right sequence of reading and information flow common to Western societies; Machin (2010) also comments on the way language builds on information, creating a natural movement beginning with what is known and progressing to what is unknown. Thus in Kress and van Leeuwen's system, the left/right structure is designated as 'given/new', in which the left hand space equates to the 'given' zone, where things which are known and accepted as part of 'what goes without saying' are located, and the right hand space is the 'new' zone where new, previously unknown information - and by extension new possibilities and solutions - are presented. Placing Evangelista's face on the left hand side of the composition in the given zone is ideologically meaningful in that by

doing so external standards regarding female appearance and attitudes to ageing are encoded and affirmed. In this way the advertisers seek to normalise the construction of femininity represented by Evangelista (artificially glamorous, unwrinkled, passive), so that it is received as a given, passing unquestioned into the collective consciousness; by extension the message encoded about ageing is that its visible signs should also be airbrushed away. The covert power of the ‘alreadyness’ (Williamson 1978: 44) of these compositional choices means that the reader is recruited into an act of unconscious collaboration (see above) with the ideologies hidden there, positioned by assumption into sharing, even aspiring to, these standards and expectations. The product message, located on the right hand side of the space in the ‘new’ zone indicates that the information contained there has not been encountered before. Other visual elements combine to reinforce the sense of a new and exciting disclosure: the prominent ‘new’ flash; the dark, highly saturated background colour which as Machin (2010) suggests, has the effect of dialling up emotional intensity; the graphic device of white pulse waves radiating out from the product which express in visual terms the ‘micro-pulse’ action of the product, but at a deeper level connote the power of science in solving the effects of the ageing appearance (see section 6.3.3 below), problematised in the text as: ‘dark circles, wrinkles, puffiness’.

Celebrity endorsement: ‘alreadyness’ and assumption

Celebrity endorsement is a common convention in skincare advertising and is used by the L’Oréal brand across all its media activity. As a communicative device it operates on a number of levels; in these two texts, the celebrity and the product are not inherently linked except by visual juxtaposition, but the effect is to create an assumption that they are connected. The link is supplied by the values the reader already associates with a particular celebrity (e.g. Evangelista’s youthful beauty and glamour, Fox’s sex appeal) and the meaning the product is trying to connote (e.g. the appearance of youthful beauty, maintaining sex appeal). Thus the values and meaning attached to both Evangelista and Fox are appropriated by the brand and transferred to the product; this process of transference makes use of a relationship which already exists in the mind of readers between the celebrities as signifiers⁴⁸ and what they signify (youth, glamour, sex appeal). In this way an eye product can be made

⁴⁸ Chapter 3 outlines semiotic theory as defined by de Saussure and the way it has been developed in Kress and van Leeuwen’s theory of social semiotics (1996, 2006)

to signify youthfulness or sexiness, thereby completing the circuit of meaning described by Williamson (1978). She further contends that for the consumer, the process of linking an image and a product is an act of unconscious collaboration with ideologies which are presented as established truths, which Barthes describes as ‘the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*’ (1957: xix), and is deliberately exploited by the subtle structural, compositional and visual devices used in these texts. Bound up in the choice of models, or ‘social actors’ in Kress and van Leeuwen’s terminology, are more deeply embedded messages concerning culturally endorsed constructions of femininity and masculinity which are reflected back to readers not only through compositional structure, but via other visual and textual devices.

Social actors: intimacy and distance

Both texts use near-life size headshots of the social actors which establishes a physical proximity with the viewer, although this serves a different communicative purpose in each text. Evangelista looks upwards and into the distance, not meeting the viewer’s gaze. In Kress and van Leeuwen’s system this is an ‘offer’ image (1996 (2006): 127–128) i.e. in which no response is expected or required from viewers and consequently no intimacy or emotional engagement is created. The lack of direct gaze connotes a lack of direct address by the social actor; she becomes the surveyed female as Berger (1972) suggests, an object presented to an external gaze which in this context is more likely to be female than male. Berger writes that

women are depicted in a quite different way from men –not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him (1972: 58)

It may be that the depiction of the social actor in ‘L’Oréal Linda’ represents a deliberate manipulation of the gendered gaze in which, as Paul Messaris argues, the lens is treated ‘as a substitute for the eye of an imaginary male onlooker’ (1997: 41), forcing women to ‘look at themselves as a man might see them’ (ibid). Although Berger argues that ‘the ideal spectator is always assumed to be male’, evidence from the accounts of participants in this study suggests that the nature of the female gaze has become more complex (see 5.2.3 above).

Whilst women may look at advertisements such as these and ‘see themselves as a man might see them’, they are also assessing the advertisements – and themselves – from the imagined viewpoint of other women. Thus the female viewer is positioned by the advertisement’s semiotic resources as part of a cycle of reflexivity which invites her both to contemplate the

ideal of femininity presented to her by the advertiser, and also, implicitly, to assess her own femininity against the inferred culturally approved standard; in 'L'Oréal Linda' this is a highly stylised, artificial, passive representation in which expression - apart from the demure half smile suggested by the model's parted lips - and personality have been airbrushed away. What remains are the aesthetic attributes which encode an ideal of feminine beauty which, through the presentation of the model's smooth and wrinkle free face, is made synonymous with youthfulness.

By contrast, in 'L'Oréal Matthew', the social actor meets the gaze of the viewer directly and fully. The composition of the text and the way the headshot is cropped mean that the focal point is the eyes, which seem to be on a level with those of the viewer so that their gaze is inescapable. In Kress and van Leeuwen's terminology this is a 'demand' image (1996 (2006): 127 – 128), in which a response is elicited – demanded – from the reader. The expression in the eyes is both knowing and intimate, humorous with an unmistakeably sexual undertone; the degree of engagement demanded by the gaze is so powerful that the viewer is both hailed and held by a connection which is compelling in its intensity. The sense of being directly addressed is reinforced by the text, which breaks into the image of the face: "Last night? Never happened." The use of an apparently direct quotation, positioned prominently above Fox's name, creates the assumption of his ownership of the message and the layers of meaning contained within it. As with other advertisements aimed at a primarily male audience, advertisers are aware of a secondary female audience (see 6.3.4 below) of wives/girlfriends /sisters which influences the decision making process surrounding male grooming products in a variety of ways: as gate-keepers, endorsers, permission-givers and often purchasers. To a hypothetical female viewer, there is a suggestion of sexual conquest implicit in the combination of text and image which establishes an asymmetry of power relations, positioning her as the one exploited and ultimately denied ('Never happened'.) For its core male target, the same combination of visual and textual elements assumes male complicity by ensuring that the message to be decoded is "have a good time and get away with it". This is a complex piece of subject positioning which validates the values and stances of traditional heterosexual masculinity through implicitly objectifying women, whilst normalising the use of a product which has historically been located in an exclusively female

domain, what Coupland terms ‘the strategies used to provide ‘securely’ masculine imagery in a traditionally feminine marketplace’ (2007: 49).

Modality: reality as an ideological statement

Halliday and Mathiessen describe the function of modality as being ‘to construe the region of uncertainty that lies between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ (2004: 147). Kress and van Leeuwen transpose the concept of modality from the linguistic model of grammar to their system of visual grammar, arguing that degrees of certainty and reality can also be expressed visually. In his analysis of Kress and van Leeuwen’s system, Machin comments that for them

modality is ‘interpersonal’. It is not about expressing absolute truths but about aligning listeners with some truths and distancing them from others (2010:48).

Therefore in the context of visual analysis, modality means ‘how real a representation should be taken to be’ (Machin 2010: 46). The importance of modality as a tool for understanding images lies in the ideologies which are revealed by the manipulation of reality. As Machin argues,

asking what is hidden, changed, lessened in importance, or what is enhanced, given increased salience, can tell us about the view of the world that is being created for us (ibid).

Thus in Kress and van Leeuwen’s system, high modality correlates with a high degree of articulation of detail and is therefore intended to reflect what could be observed in real life; by contrast low modality means a low articulation of detail which is less likely to appear naturalistic and to reflect reality.

‘L’Oréal Linda’ shows different levels of articulation of detail within the central image; different elements of the face are subject to varying manipulations of reality. The skin of the face has clearly been heavily airbrushed and retouched because no details of skin texture or even facial contours are visible; it is a highly idealised, artificial image, classified in Kress and van Leeuwen’s terminology as low modality. A high degree of modality is used on the eyes, however, so that details of eyelashes, eyebrows, even the irises themselves are highly articulated almost to the level of hyper-reality; even tiny blood vessels in the whites of the eyes have been airbrushed out, whilst the surrounding skin is impossibly smooth and free from any wrinkles or discolouration. The use of different degrees of modality within the same image is a deliberate visual strategy on the part of the advertiser both to create and

attempt to reconcile, contradictions inherent in the advertising message: the high degree of articulation of the eyes themselves, signifying that this is a truthful reflection of reality is intended to suggest the efficacy of the product, whilst the low degree of detail in the skin around the eyes is intended to convey the power of the product promise of younger-looking and rejuvenated eyes. The low modality of the face as a whole encodes an ideological message about the ageing female appearance which does not include the visible signs of ageing. The 'L'Oréal Matthew' advertisement also gives greatest salience to the eyes of the model; as already discussed, this is a relatively naturalistic image in which the details of eyes, eyebrow hairs, depth and colour of the irises are highly articulated. In contrast to 'L'Oréal Linda', however, the skin texture underneath Fox's eyes remains visible showing individual pores and fine lines, and there are discernible lines on the skin of the forehead. Here the high degree of modality encodes a very different attitude towards the ageing male appearance, based on realism not idealisation, on achievable not impossible aspiration, in which lines and wrinkles are not shameful but are considered acceptable - even sexy. Thus the comparative analysis of these two texts shows how visual and lexical elements combine to support traditional constructions of femininity and heterosexual masculinity, perpetuating fundamentally gendered cultural attitudes to ageing.

6.3.2 Ageing begins early: Clarins



This advertisement features a model in her late teens or early twenties, and is clearly intended to target a young female audience with the product it features: ‘Multi-Active Day Early wrinkle correction cream.’ The advertisement’s discursive strategy ‘appellates’ readers (Williamson 1978: 44) through a combination of visual and textual semiotic resources designed to create an assumption of intimacy⁴⁹.

The assumption of familiarity

A visual framing device divides the composition along a vertical axis, with the text located on the left-hand side of the space in the given zone. This is already an assumptive strategy in that by doing so it presents the information as already known and familiar to the viewer. Syntactically, the text works to support this assumption of familiarity through a number of linguistic devices. The first is a question/answer sequence in which the authorial voices are made deliberately ambiguous. ‘Early wrinkles?’ could be interpreted either as a question asked directly of the viewer by an unspecified external/authorial voice, (i.e. ‘do **you** have early wrinkles?’) or could issue from the model herself, or could equally be a question the viewer might ask of herself as she looks in the mirror (i.e. ‘do **I** have early wrinkles?’). According to Coupland, such ambiguity is a deliberate tactic on the part of advertisers ‘in that irrespective of the authorial voice affected, they adopt an uncompromisingly negative stance towards ageing’ (2003: 130). Thus the response to the question -‘No thank you!’- is also assumptive, whether its provenance is the viewer or the social actor, and this act of ‘alreadyness’ creates a subject position which suggests to women in their (early) twenties that they should start worrying about the signs of ageing. The readiness with which this subject position is accepted is borne out by the reactions of some of the younger female participants in the study (see footnote 46). These shifting authorial voices continue through the body of the text, and appear to be a deliberate discursive strategy to create ambivalence as to who is speaking. The text begins with ‘the voice of a friend’ (Talbot 2010: 150) via the use of the direct address of ‘your’, (‘Multi-Active Day is **your** stay-young strategy’), employing what

⁴⁹ Evidence of the success of this strategy can be seen in the enthusiastic reactions to this advertising of two of the younger female participants, e.g.:

F2-23 this one [sc. Clarins] appeals to me ‘cos it says early wrinkles no thank you

Talbot terms ‘synthetic personalisation’ (1995: 147) - a faux familiarity based on the assumption of ideological common ground (i.e. anxiety about the signs of ageing even in your 20s). It then shifts to one of detached expertise, in order to deliver a ‘solution’ expressed as ‘quasi-scientific discourse (Coupland 2003: 131), (‘this unique formula enhances skin’s natural resistance...’). This is what Barthel terms ‘the voice of science’ (1988: 45), arguing that it is associated with the voice of male authority (see below). The final voice is a corporate one, establishing ultimate ownership of the message in the form of a generic brand endorsement, (‘Clarins. No. 1 in European luxury skincare’).

Examining the structure of the advertising message allows the ideological assumptions on which it is based to be uncovered – what Fairclough terms the process of ‘denaturalising’ (2010: 38, see also 3.2.1 above) - starting with the articulation of the desired state, which presents ‘the importance of bodily beauty as a taken-for-granted assumption’ (Coupland 2003: 128) (i.e. ‘The future looks beautiful’). This is broken down into its components: ‘stay-young’ (i.e. the aesthetic standard required to enter the desired state) and ‘age-defying’ (i.e. the course of action necessary to get there). The juxtaposition of ‘stay-young’ and ‘age-defying’ establishes this as a problem-solution text (see Coupland 2003, 2007). The visible signs of ageing, (‘early lines and wrinkles’) are problematised by the negatively evaluative nature of the language: ‘defying’ draws on associations with embattled resistance, and ‘correction’ connotes error and deviance from the norm. By contrast, the opposite state is described in positively evaluated terms, (‘smooth’, moisture-perfected’) which implicitly suggest values associated with youthfulness. Other physical threats to the skin (‘fatigue, pollution, and UV stress’) are conflated with the process of ageing, enabling the product to appear as the solution to all of the skin’s problems. The solution is thus presented as both aesthetic and efficacious, by drawing on several conflicting discourses: pseudo-science (‘this unique formula’), nature (‘age-defying plant extracts’), and beauty (‘help skin stay smooth’).

Social actor as idealised representation

The focal point of the advertisement is the model’s face, shown at almost life size, with her neck and part of her upper chest also visible. Although the advertisement is divided vertically by a framing device, the headshot has been placed in the upper half of the space, creating a horizontal division, so that the model’s face is located in the ‘ideal’ zone as defined in Kress

and van Leeuwen's system, where culturally endorsed aesthetic standards and expectations are encoded. Thus the message to the reader is that this is the ideal of youthful female beauty and resisting the process of ageing already plays a prominent part in achieving it. The juxtaposition of the text 'Early wrinkles? No thank you!' with the model's impossibly smooth face implies her ownership of the words, further reinforcing her status as the embodiment of the brand's (and by extension society's) 'stay-young strategy'. She has chosen to resist early wrinkles, and implicitly invites the viewer to do the same. Her eyes and lips are given greatest salience, highly articulated in comparison with the low modality of the rest of her face which is indistinct almost to the point of abstraction, seeming by contrast to melt into the background (see below). Her eyes appear to be almost level with those of the reader, so that the connection made by the directness of her gaze is immediate. Her expression is open and direct with a suggestion of vulnerability, reinforced by the tilted angle of the head, which appears to lean casually against a surface which is just out of sight. The impression is of a door she has just opened, out of which she gazes at the viewer with an air of tentative invitation. The subdued pinkness of the lips, their natural contour lines revealed by careful highlighting, further adds to the visual impression of naturalness and lack of adornment.

Modality: different degrees of reality

Different levels of modality are used to manipulate degrees of reality in order to generate an emotional context within which evaluations of youthfulness – and by inference ageing – can be conveyed. Low modality is used in the depiction of the skin and background, creating a slightly blurred, fuzzy and indistinct effect into which details of facial features, bone structure and clothing are subsumed. The impression created is dreamlike, the soft mistiness of the visual effect adding a sense of nostalgia – perhaps summoning in the mind of the viewer the softly unfocused sepia photographs associated with long ago events. By contrast the eyes have been given a high degree of articulation; individual eyelashes, the hairs of the eyebrows, even the reflections in the irises are visible. The intention may be to convey the truthfulness of the image as a representation of reality, but this is contradicted by the skin immediately above and below the eyes which has clearly been airbrushed, and all natural texture and contours smoothed away from the face as a whole. This suggests a conscious strategy on the part of the advertisers: the dominance of the eyes and their relative naturalism may be an attempt to lend credibility and an impression of verisimilitude to the advertisement as a

whole. The colour palette, which van Leeuwen describe as ‘the modality of the senses’ (2005: 170) also works to reinforce the mood of dreamy, other-worldliness; the wash of light, pale, neutral tones has associations of tranquillity and purity, and the lack of saturation suggests peacefulness rather than emotional intensity. Through the combination of modality and colour, the visual becomes a manifestation of the ideological; the unreality which characterises the visual style of the advertisement becomes a technique of idealisation. The model’s face, invested with a luminous, ethereal quality, in which the purity and soft-focus smoothness of the skin, almost abstracted into the background, seems to essentialise the state of youthfulness. The ‘gaze of youth’ (Furman 1997: 5) in the model’s eyes, turned upon the reader, conveys a sense of timelessness but also transience - the implication is that its smooth perfection, already vulnerable to the effects of time and ageing, must be determinedly protected from them *now*. The beautiful future promised by the advertising text is built on the cult of youth within which the signs of ageing have no place, as the final exhortation states; ‘Wrinkles can wait!’

6.3.3 The voice of authority – discourses of science: Estée Lauder, Lancôme, L’Oréal





As Barthel (1988) and Coupland (2003, 2007) argue, a common strategy amongst advertisers in this market is to make use of the discourses of science to pathologise ageing by suggesting that the “problem” of the ageing (female) appearance can only be solved by complex-sounding scientised solutions, presented as unarguable and authoritative by ‘the voice of science’ (Barthel 1988: 45) which, as Barthel argues, is often associated with ‘the male voice insofar as it speaks the voice of reason and logic, of proven fact’ (1988: 45). The analysis takes three advertising texts (see below): Estée Lauder ‘Advanced Night Repair’, Lancôme ‘Renergie Yeux Multitple Lift’ and L’Oréal Revitalift,’ all of which employ the ‘voice of science’ in the discursive construction of their messages, to show how these ‘quasi-scientific discourses’ (Coupland 2007: 45) offer a construction of femininity based on fear/denial of ageing, and a fundamentally gendered subject position as ‘an object requiring work’ (Talbot 2010:138, see also 2.3.1 of this study).

Product as social actor

The Estée Lauder and Lancôme texts do not feature a social actor but instead invest the product shot with the status and focus usually given to the model. The L’Oréal advertisement features both a prominent product shot and a celebrity model, although only a partial shot of her face is shown. All three texts require the product to fulfil some of the communicative functions of a social actor in terms of complexity of message; in the absence of a social actor, the product must also communicate beauty-by-inference. There are commonalities in the visual treatment of the product-as-social actor, through which visual languages of science and

beauty are merged. The products are displayed against dark, richly coloured backgrounds connoting emotional intensity, and in the case of the Estée Lauder advertisement, specifically signify the nocturnal hours when the product is supposed to do its work. The dark backgrounds also visually reinforce the opulence of the creams themselves, which are depicted with an almost hyper-real level of articulation so that the contours of each creamy peak are defined and emphasised with glossy highlighting more reminiscent of food photography than cosmetics. The sensual appeal is powerful and complex, these products are made to appear literally good enough to eat. The Estée Lauder advertisement, reflecting its brand positioning (see section 6.1.1), is particularly overt in its juxtaposition of the semiotics of science and beauty. A single droplet of creamy liquid is shown suspended from the end of the product dispenser whose syringe-like form draws on associations with the laboratory. The graphic helix shape visible against the blue background visually supports the voice of science, whilst the golden creaminess of the liquid, echoing the gold of the cap and text, signifies preciousness and rarity, as well as suggesting its efficacy in the ritual of beauty. The sunburst depicted behind the product signifies the start of a new day and also rejuvenation, after the product has completed its nocturnal work of ‘repair’.

The other two brands also use colour as a powerful element in their communicative strategy. For Lancôme, the silver/blue product packaging connotes technology and futuristic science, drawing deliberately on the clinical minimalism associated with laboratory/pharmaceutical packaging, reinforced by text which places the advertisement within the discursive domain of cosmetic surgery, (‘if you are not considering a permanent lift’). The highly articulated, clinical coolness of the silver packaging forms a strong visual contrast with the abstract background against which it rests, in which flesh tones, possibly denoting areas of skin, graduate into a rich, dark purple imbued with a subtle play of darker tones suggesting texture, like soft undulations of silk, which resolve into the discernible shape of a rose, located immediately behind the product, which is an element of the brand’s visual equity symbolising femininity. The effect of these visual devices is to soften and feminise the more clinical signals given by the packaging, by juxtaposing the two domains of ‘science’ and ‘beauty’, whilst the contrasting use of modality and colour establishes an implicit hierarchy between them. The product-as-social actor, sharply defined and foregrounded against a much less

defined background suggests the pre-eminence of ‘the voice of science’, a message reinforced by the textual dimension of the communication (see also below).

The L’Oréal text makes the relationship between science and beauty more explicit; the space is divided along the vertical axis by a strong graphic line demarcating two zones of unequal size. Product and branding are located in the wider of the two zones on the left hand side of the advertisement, shown against a solid black background. The narrower half, situated on the right side of the space, is completely taken up by a portion of the actor Rachel Weisz’s face, shown as larger than life-size, in which only one eye and eyebrow, the cheek and half of the mouth are visible.⁵⁰ The structure of the composition once again carries an ideological message. The semiotics of the left hand half of the space designate it as the domain of science; it features the product shot, science-based textual claims (‘Pro-Retinol A + Pro-Firmyl’) and graphic directional arrows presumably intended to represent the action of the product. The use of a celebrity model known for her beauty (see section 6.3.1 above) in the right hand zone is a visual cue for ‘beauty’, although it is significant that the scientific text is placed over her face, obscuring an area of her skin, in effect making her face into a canvas or vehicle for the discourse of science. Product and social actor appear to have equally prominent roles, but in reality the latter is sublimated by the dominance of the former. Once again colour is an important factor in how the message is communicated. The saturated black background, with accents of red used graphically and textually, gives a feeling of intensity, almost of urgency, and the text, rendered as white out of a black background, echoing the white of the product, is given particular salience. By contrast, the pale, subdued tones of Weisz’s face, less saturated and more modulated suggest a much lower emotional temperature. Nonetheless the highly articulated rendition of her eye gazes directly at the viewer, competing for their attention with the intensity of the background colour.

‘Quasi-scientific discourses’

As discussed above, compositional and visual devices such as colour are used in all three advertisements to send a clear message to viewers about the credibility of science as the solution to the “problem” of ageing. The textual resource is a powerful factor in reinforcing

⁵⁰ The fragmented nature of this representation forms a striking parallel with the deconstructed approach participants in this study take to their own faces in the ‘mirror moment’, as described in chapter 5 section 5.1.

the voice of science and supporting its role in the problematisation of ageing. The headline text in each advertisement locates it for the reader in the domain of the laboratory: ‘Our scientists’ (Estée Lauder); ‘formulas’ (Lancôme and L’Oréal). The body text in the Lancôme and L’Oréal advertisements is organised into a series of numbered points suggesting the objectivity of an ‘official’ report, and numerical references in all three texts further reinforce the impression of hard evidence which has been statistically proven, (‘2 formulas – 6 actions’; ‘95% gave it their seal of approval’; ‘8 natural firmers’). The lexical groups draw heavily on mainstream scientific/pharmaceutical vocabulary, (‘DNA research’, ‘tested’, ‘eye rejuvenating trends’), also making particular use of obscure bio-medical terminology: ‘GF-Volumetry complex’, research on cellular communication’, (Lancôme); ‘synchronised recovery complex’ (Estée Lauder); ‘collagen, perlecan, integrin ...’ (L’Oréal). Given the impenetrable nature of much of this terminology, it is unlikely to be truly comprehensible to potential consumers; indeed the reactions of participants in this study to skincare advertising reveals a widely held scepticism both with regard to the motivations of the advertisers and the nature of their claims (see 6.2 above). Coupland argues that ‘advertisers need, then, to somehow construct messages that ‘break through’ consumers’ scepticism, or at least perhaps to construct scenarios in which consumers are motivated to ‘take control’ (2007: 41). However, as analysis in 5.2.3 above has shown, whilst participants remain generally cynical, even hostile to such advertisements, they continue to be consumers of the products. This seeming paradox raises the question of how these quasi-scientific discourses succeed in ‘appellating’ (see Williamson 1978 *passim*) the (female) consumers they target. Analysis in chapters 4 and 5 of this study suggests a possible explanation: a strategy built on women’s fear of ageing rather than the credibility - or comprehensibility - of the scientised solutions offered. The Estée Lauder text expresses this directly in the description of Advanced Night Repair as ‘the UK’s No. 1 Repair Serum women can’t live without’. The unhedged nature of this statement communicates absolute confidence and authority, despite (or perhaps due to) the lack of evidence or attribution; the uncompromising message to the reader is that ‘these women can’t live without it – and neither should you’.

In considering these three advertisements in parallel, it could be argued that the more seemingly complex the solution, the more serious the “problem” of ageing is made to appear, a notion which intersects with the prevalence of cultural discourses of ‘the body project as a

female enterprise' (Coupland 2007:42). Thus female consumers are offered a subject position which assumes that they will find their own ageing appearance sufficiently unacceptable to call upon the full authority of science. As Smith states,

...women's bodies are always imperfect. They always need fixing... without work they cannot approximate the kinds of appearance offered by images in the mass media (1988: 47)

and as analysis of these advertising discourses suggests, the ideals of appearance generally offered to women do not include the visible signs of ageing.

Evaluation of the visible signs of ageing

In all three advertisements, the lexical evaluation of ageing is strongly negative, either directly, as in the Estée Lauder text,

a reduction in the look of every key sign of ageing around your eyes – fine lines, wrinkles, dark circles, dryness, puffiness and uneven skin tones

or by implicit contrast with the opposite state, as demonstrated by Lancôme:

1. Dark circles appear reduced
2. Bags appear reduced
3. Eye contour looks more luminous etc

That the signs of ageing are listed in such detail, as Coupland argues, 'clearly presupposes the undesirability of visibly aged skin' (2007: 44). This is reinforced by the use of metaphorical language such as 'repair' with its associations of things which are broken, and 'Multiple Lift' (Lancôme) which clearly draws on cosmetic surgery discourses (see below). However all three advertisements qualify their product claims: 'the **look of** every key sign...(Estée Lauder); 'younger-**looking** eyes (Lancôme); 'wrinkles **appear** reduced' (L'Oréal). In commenting on this finding in her own research, Coupland (2007) notes the dichotomy inherent in qualifiers such as these which focus on appearance, and a product promise based around the language of fixing, ('repair') or more radical intervention ('Multiple Lift'), arguing that the semantic associations thus created between 'the look of' and 'repair' suggest that 'appearance itself can have the quality of being 'worn out' (2007: 44). This ideological incoherence is more striking in the Lancôme and L'Oréal advertisements which both clearly locate their messages within the discursive domain of cosmetic surgery. The Lancôme text states:

Renergie Yeux Multiple Lift

Inspired by the latest eye rejuvenation trends, Lancome invents Renergie Yeux Multiple Lift. If you are not considering a permanent lift, experience our first duo for younger-looking eyes.

The L'Oréal text reads:

New Revitalift
Anti-wrinkle and firming
It's not a facelift, it's Revitalift

The discursive association with the more radical solution offered by surgical intervention is clearly present in the way both brands position themselves as alternatives to cosmetic surgery by seeming to offer comparable results, even though these are based on the 'look of', and signs of ageing which 'appear reduced'. The implications of absorbing references to cosmetic surgery into the domain of cosmetic products are significant; as Coupland comments, 'these texts play a part in normalizing or naturalizing cosmetic surgery, as a means to 'improve' or 'rescue' female facial appearance' (2007: 46). Not only that, the assumption underlying these advertising messages is that the "problem" of female ageing needs radical solutions, even if they stop short of surgical intervention.

This section of the analysis has shown that the discourses of science as they are directed at women are inextricably linked with the problematisation of ageing; these are voices of 'moral authority' (Coupland 2003: 132) and judgement, which establish an unequal power relationship with potential consumers, who as a result must attend to and "fix" their ageing faces. Advertisers exploit the culturally generated fear of ageing by using negatively evaluative language which assumes – and reinforces - the cultural distaste (see Woodward 1991) for the ageing female appearance, and deliberately obscure pseudo-scientific terminology which emphasises the complexity of the solution and therefore the magnitude of the problem. When the discourses of science are adapted for a male audience, however, a very different ideological and communicative stance is taken.

6.3.3.1 The 'voice of science' for a male audience

The following advertisement from GQ Magazine (April 2011) has been included as a point of comparison. Whilst it shares some superficial points of commonality with the three texts analysed above (i.e. absence of a social actor, product as a central vehicle for the message), at a more fundamental level it illustrates how the voice of science can be reframed for a male audience to deliver a very different message about ageing.



This is an advertorial text, a genre which combines advertising and editorial content, significant for this analysis because of the different relationship between the authorial voice and the consumer, resulting from its ‘hybrid’ status (Coupland 2007: 49). Talbot argues that in the advertorial, ‘the boundary between advertising and editorial material has become blurred’ (2010: 145); as advertisements encroach further into the territory of magazine content it becomes less easy to distinguish promotional from editorial material. As analysis of this text will demonstrate, the fluid and complex relationship between authorial voice(s), the nature of the message and the consumers it targets, creates an ambiguity about the ownership of the ideological position it encodes which in this case, is deliberately exploited by the advertiser. The text presents a new product from Sisley, a brand owned by a French family-run company whose traditional territory has been upscale women’s skincare products. The ‘Sisleyum Anti-Age Global Revitaliser’ represents their first incursion into the male skincare market. As discussed in section 6.3.1 above, an advertising text targeting men with a product from a traditionally female domain must perform a complex series of negotiations with the construction of gender identity, arguably even more so for the Sisley brand, given its traditional association with the female market. The first paragraph of the body text references this female heritage, ‘you thought you’d only touch her Sisley once’, but only in order to frame the brand as a legitimate object of desire for a male consumer by linking it with other high status objects, ‘imagine her cracking open your last Chateau Lafite’, and even ‘an occasionally high-maintenance female’. What is of particular relevance here, however, is

how the ‘voice of science’ - an advertising discourse generally used to target women - (see 6.3.3 above) is ‘reformulated into subtly different frames of meaning, taken to define ‘men’s values’ and men’s stances’ (Coupland 2007: 49). Visual and textual modes combine to achieve this subtle reformulation, including the inherently ambiguous format of the advertorial itself.

The headline ‘Grooming’ designates a regular section in the magazine’s content where new products, selected to appeal to the so-called metrosexual⁵¹ market, are featured. ‘Grooming’ is a word now legitimised by its widespread usage in the developing male skincare market⁵² so the discursive framing of the feature already places the product in the domain of the right balance of acceptable self-maintenance without being narcissistic, a strategy designed to create a subject position which allows a potential male consumer to conform to norms of acceptable male-ness in a traditionally female domain. In her analysis of male skincare texts, and what they reveal about constructions of masculinity, Coupland describes

the marketing strategies used... [which] reveal an ideologically complex and changing version of masculinity, as it relates to the risks associated with ageing and the solutions available to counter these risks. This shifting version of masculinity is encouraged to turn its gaze to the mirror under the protection of a range of mitigating discourses which offset potential attributions of unmanly narcissism (2007:57).

Juxtaposed with the headline, as if presenting it to the reader, is an image of the female editor, an attractive woman in her mid 30s, whose stance and appearance suggest confidence without challenge, and an element of glamour and sexiness via hair styling and clothing choice, without being too overt. This creates the assumption of her ownership of the magazine’s viewpoint on grooming, that what follows is written by her, in her voice – an impression reinforced by the direct address used throughout, (‘**you** can either pick one or seasonally switch between the two’) and her personal sign-off (‘JP’). The presence of a female gatekeeper, presenting the product from a position of authority in a magazine with a primarily male readership, is ideologically significant. Here, male consumers are directly addressed through the lens of a female gaze in a way which specifically references the wider

⁵¹ The term ‘metrosexual’, coined by the journalist Mark Simpson in 1994, originally described a man (especially one living in an urban environment) ‘who is especially meticulous about his grooming and appearance typically spending a significant amount of time and money on shopping for this’ (source: Wikipedia). Although the term has slipped out of usage to some degree, metrosexual values of grooming/interest in appearance still have currency via role models such as David Beckham.

⁵² The rise in awareness of the term grooming used in the sense of online sexual predation may, however, may compromise the legitimacy/desirability of its use in the context of the men’s magazine.

female gaze of wives and girlfriends ('Your face will thank you and she'll be glad you finally bought your own'). Thus the product is explained - and endorsed - by the voice of female authority which becomes the de facto voice of science, ('it's infused with plant extracts to combat wrinkles, stress and loss of firmness'). This is the only discursive link between the discourse of science and the signs of ageing before a subtle shift in the focus of the message frames the product proposition in terms of sensible skin maintenance:

parched winter skin and a post shave-face will like the comforting cream version, while the matt gel consistency works best during the summer months.

As with the female-targeted texts analysed above, here the social actor is also absent and the product made the central visual focus of the communication, although the language used is strikingly different from the anxiety-based discourses of pseudo-science. The product shot has been composed to suggest high-tech engineering components; gleaming silver cylindrical forms connote the speed and sophisticated technology associated with Formula 1 racing, an association reinforced by the sub-head, 'Firing on all cylinders'. These are all examples of Coupland's 'mitigating discourses' (see above) designed to support the values of heterosexual masculinity: the female (but not feminised) voice of expertise; the passing reference to ageing in favour of discourses of discerning body-maintenance; and the association of the product with 'archetypally hyper-masculine imagery' (Coupland 2007: 51). The message to the male consumer is that the use of products such as these is not only legitimate, but viewed as a necessary part of pursuing the real purpose of male grooming which is to maintain sexual attractiveness for the wider female gaze.

The operation of the female gaze in this text is complex: it is a literal gaze, in the form of the image of the female editor whose appraising gaze meets the reader's eyes directly, and also the voice of expertise which identifies both with the potential male consumer, in legitimising male grooming rituals and supporting values of traditional masculinity, and with the (imagined) female audience, by invoking a wider female perspective with repeated use of 'she' and 'her', thus keeping the hypothetical female viewpoint present throughout the text.

In commenting on her own data, Coupland writes

the male gaze is never mentioned in advertisements for women... Advertisers envisage the female consumer to be more concerned with her symbolic capital in a more generalised way, with the public marketplace subsuming the male gaze, which therefore doesn't need to be mentioned' (2007: 55).

What she is describing is the taken-for-granted nature of the presence of the male gaze, which, according to Berger, still informs contemporary visual communication:

... the essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. (1972: 58)

Messaris writes that advertisements which use women to target women, ‘appear to imply a male point of view, even though the intended viewer is often a woman’ (1997: 44), echoing Berger’s observation that ‘men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at’ (1972: 41). Implicit in this argument is the contention that spectatorship plays a part in constructing - and perpetuating – gendered power relations; Jonathan Schroeder (1998) (cited in Chandler 1998: 1) states that the gaze ‘signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze’ (1998: 208). Thus in the ‘L’Oréal Matthew’ advertisement analysed in section 6.3.1, the male social actor returns the gaze of the viewer directly, establishing a ‘mutuality of the gaze’ (Lutz and Collins 1994: 373, cited in Chandler 1998) which, if the viewer is male, is based on an equality of power. In the female-targeted ‘L’Oréal Linda’ text, Evangelista does not meet the viewer’s gaze, looking instead into the middle distance; offering herself as the object of the viewer’s gaze in this way sets up an inequality of power relations. As already discussed, the reactions of participants in this study to skincare advertisements and representations of women in the wider domains of the media suggest that the nature of the female gaze, when directed at other women, may be changing, and becoming the ‘active’ gaze (Chandler 1998: 3) more usually attributed to men, with the result that women are in equal measure surveyors and surveyed. That said, in the counter-discourses which have begun to re-shape the skincare market in recent years, the female gaze can be seen working in different ways, within a different communicative context.

6.3.4 Emerging counter-discourses

In the last decade, a number of skincare advertisements have started presenting women to the gaze of other women in ways which challenge the conventions of this market. That said, Gill and Elias offer a more nuanced perspective on work such as the Dove and Boots campaigns analysed below, classifying the messages they contain as ‘love your body (LYB) discourses’ (2014: 179) (see also above). They point out that such discourses appear to break market

conventions built around negative judgement and surveillance of women's bodies, but in fact, as they go on to argue,

they do not represent a straightforward liberation from tyrannical beauty standards, and may in fact instantiate new, more pernicious forms of power that engender a shift from bodily to psychic regulation.... they are much more ambivalent texts than they seem to be (2014: 180)

Furthermore, the question remains as to the status of the ageing female body within this discursive context.

'Real women': The Dove brand

The Dove brand capitalised on a shift already happening in other domains of the media, exemplified by Nigel Cole's 2003 film *Calendar Girls* starring Helen Mirren and Julie Walters. Their 'Campaign for Real Beauty' was launched in 2004 in response to a global study commissioned by Unilever, the brand owner: 'The Real truth About Beauty: A Global report' (source: www.campaignforrealbeauty.com)⁵³. The findings indicated that the majority of women who participated felt that 'the definition of beauty had become limited and unattainable', so the mission behind the 2004 campaign was to challenge beauty stereotypes which had come to define the visual and ideological landscape of this market, as exemplified by 'L'Oréal Linda' (see 6.3.1 above). The Dove brand broke new ground by using un-airbrushed "real" women (i.e. not models) of all ages from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, chosen to represent "normal" (i.e. less than perfect) female appearance e.g.:

⁵³ The report was a collaboration between contributors drawn from a number of different domains, both academic and commercial: Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Harvard University; Dr. Susie Orbach, London School of Economics; Dr. Jennifer Scott and Heidi D'Agostino, StrategyOne



However, Gill and Elias challenge the ‘iconography of ‘natural’, ‘real’ women’ (2014: 187), referencing discussion of ‘the realness of/visual fraud of Dove Pro-Age texts’ (ibid). The campaign’s apparent trademark visual style was to photograph headshots and full bodyshots of women in a naturalistic, un-posed way, without digital manipulation, often in underwear or completely naked, but always returning the gaze of the viewer directly and fully. In 2007 Dove launched a third phase of the campaign, a global study amongst older women (source: www.dove.co.uk/en) which revealed that ‘91% of women ages 50–64 believe that it is time for society to change its views about women and ageing’. The resulting campaign featured women aged 50+, ‘wrinkles, age spots, grey hair and all’. Thus it could be argued that the Dove brand opened up a communicative space in which different discourses concerning the ageing appearance were possible and different ideologies about ageing could be explored.

The reciprocal gaze: Boots No 7

Boots, the pharmaceutical, health and beauty retailer, has more recently followed the Dove brand with the 2011 launch of the ‘Tah Dah’ campaign (see below) for its No 7 skincare and cosmetic brand. Commentary in *Marketing Magazine* immediately prior to the launch, stated that the Boots campaign

aims to show that No 7 products “really work” by using images of models that have not been airbrushed or retouched and ensuring none of the models have received cosmetic surgery. (source: *Marketing Magazine* online version 5/8/2011)

Furthermore, the head of the No 7 brand, Amanda Walker, was quoted as saying;

what we want to show with the ‘Tah Dah’ campaign is a moment in time that all women have, when they know they look and, perhaps more importantly, feel, their absolute best. (ibid)



This advertisement can therefore be viewed in the context of ideological territory which appears to have been consciously shifted from anxiety to celebration, from idealised to real, and from negative evaluation of the ageing appearance to a discourse of acceptance. The advertisement is a double page spread presenting the range of products which constitute Boots’ anti-ageing skincare offer. In compositional terms this is a ‘given-new’ structure (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, van Leeuwen 2005), which locates the products in the ‘new’ zone and the social actor in the ‘given’ zone. As discussed in preceding sections, the compositional structure is intended as a visual expression of an underlying ideology; placing the social actor in the given zone implicitly aligns her with externally endorsed standards of aesthetic acceptability but in the case of the model featured here, all semiotic resources combine to convey a representation of aesthetic acceptability which appears strikingly different from the ‘L’Oreal Linda’ and Clarins texts.

The model is shown as a three-quarter body shot rather than the more conventionally used headshot. Her upper torso, arms and hands are visible, which may be intended to acknowledge the existence of the whole woman rather than the (more usual) decontextualised face, and as such could be seen as a counter to discourses which deconstruct the body (see Furman 1997 and 5.1.3 above) into disembodied components. Thus the message to the reader is that beauty does not only reside in the face but in the whole person. Furthermore, in line with the stated aims of this campaign (see above), the image appears naturalistic and not airbrushed, reinforced by the brand sign-off 'she's not airbrushed, she's not retouched, she's just No 7'. Laughter lines, facial contours, moles and skin texture are all visible, and the slightly untidy tumble of her curly hair suggests that this, too, has been left in its natural state. This is a high modality image but without the manipulation of different degrees of reality noted in some of the other examples analysed above. However, it is the model's expression which immediately draws the gaze of the viewer; this is a demand image (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, van Leeuwen 2005) in which the model looks directly at the viewer, establishing eye contact. Her expression suggests confidence, enjoyment and fun, with a hint of complicity with the reader as if a joke has been shared. Her broad smile, the natural tilt of her head and position of her hands suggest the natural conversational pose of someone caught in the middle of a making a comment or telling a story. The warmth and directness of her gaze invites – even assumes - a relationship with the (female) viewer based on intimacy and candour, often regarded as characteristics of female (rather than male) friendships (see Coates and Cameron 1988, Holmes 2006, Tannen 2007). Thus the reader is appalled by the model's gaze and invited to appraise her, whilst the intimate power of her gaze creates the assumption of reciprocity, in which the appraisal will be supportive and positively evaluative rather than competitive.

The assumption of a personal relationship with the reader is further reinforced in the textual mode. Two lines of text are located directly over the model's chest, breaking into the image; 'At 28, I knew who I was, at 38 I love who I am'. The juxtaposition of words and image, and repeated use of 'I' imply that these are the model's own words and that the acceptance inherent in her disclosure of her age comes directly from a self-described journey from self-knowledge to self-worth, implicit in the apposition of 'I knew' with the positive affect of 'I love'. Here, decadal age markers are used as the basis of positive, rather than negative,

comparison⁵⁴. The authorial voice changes in the product-focused text on the opposite page, to become a depersonalised, although not impersonal, voice. Personal address remains a central linguistic feature via the use of ‘you’, (‘Supercharge **your** regime’), but its provenance is unclear. The shift in authorial voice from personal to more depersonalised endorsement is a deliberate manipulation of the textual resource, allowing the advertisers to counterbalance emotional and rational messages. Coupland remarks that such authorial ambiguity ‘appears to be positively functional for the marketing purposes of features and advertisements’ (2003: 130) in this case allowing important product information to be transmitted (e.g. ‘clinically proven serum’) by a credible, friendly voice of expertise. The voice of friendly expertise continues to construct the ageing process as inherently positive through lexis such as ‘supercharge’, and ‘tailor-made’. There is no overt mention or negative evaluation of ageing and its visible signs; instead the communicative approach about normalising the skin’s changing needs at different stages in the lifecourse (‘your regime’, ‘tailor-made for every age’). This is further reinforced by product descriptors, ‘protect and perfect’, ‘lift and luminate’, ‘restore and renew’, which call on vocabulary more traditionally associated with discourses of youth (i.e. ‘renew’) to characterise the needs of the ageing skin.

6.4 Summary

The Boots text appears to encode a very different ideology about ageing, in which the process of ageing itself is inferred rather than relentlessly catalogued, and positioned as the natural accompaniment to positively-viewed lived experience (‘At 38 I love who I am’). That said, Gill and Elias’s work provides an interesting perspective by suggesting that such ‘LYB’ discourses (see above) are inherently problematic in that ‘women must makeover not simple their bodies, but now – thanks to LYB discourse – their subjectivity as well, embracing an affirmative, confident disposition’ (2014: 190). However, the ‘devastating fierce acuity’ (Orbach 1986: 36) of the female gaze, especially when turned upon other women, appears to be diffused by a representation of ‘real’ and achievable beauty rather than impossible standards of perfection only achievable through artifice. Consequently, a construction of ageing femininity based around acceptance, as exemplified by the Boots and Dove

⁵⁴ The analysis of the interview data in this study (see chapters 4 and 5) suggests that chronological age markers remain highly significant for participants of all ages, and amongst mid-life and older cohorts are generally negatively evaluated.

campaigns, and mediated through the positive reciprocity of the female gaze, appears as a credible counter-discourse, a possibility borne out by the reactions of some participants in this study to these advertisements, as illustrated by this extract from a 54 year-old female participant:

... this [sc. Dove ad] which I love and I think is the greatest work in beauty ever done right for women y'know one of my top campaigns ever...(F11-54)

Nonetheless, evidence from the wider body of interview data in this study suggests that these messages, however persuasive, have yet to permeate and materially influence individual mirror moments. Furthermore, analysis of these examples of skincare advertising suggests that, although such counter-discourses appear to be gaining ground in the media, ageing is still more often problematised for women through discourses which relentlessly articulate and negatively evaluate its visible signs, and perpetuate the pressure to conform to stereotypes of female beauty. 'Solutions' to the 'problem' of female ageing are offered in the form of pseudo-scientific discourses which, as Coupland remarks, are delivered in a 'much more serious, committed and fear-based style' (2007: 54) in contrast with the more ironic, light-hearted and sexually knowing framing which characterises communicative approaches aimed at men⁵⁵ which Gill (2007) also references as a characteristic of postfeminist media culture. The way ageing is dealt with visually and discursively in the male-targeted advertisements indicates that ageing remains a fundamentally gendered phenomenon which allows the ageing male appearance to be evaluated as sexy, but in which the process of ageing is inferred rather than made explicit, its visible signs incorporated within the 'protection of a range of mitigating discourses' (Coupland 2007: 57). The exploration of these themes continues in chapter 7, which focuses on a range of media discourses.

⁵⁵ Macdonald cites the prevalence of the 'folklinguistic mythology' (2003: 59) which characterises jokes and comic banter as a feature of male discourse versus the gossiping and nagging which defines female discourse.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PUBLIC DISCOURSES (II): MEDIA DISCOURSES OF AGEING

7.0 Introduction

Chapter 6 examined ways in which ageing is problematised for women in a particular domain of public discourse: mainstream anti-ageing skincare advertising. Building on evidence from interview data in chapters 4 and 5 of this study, which suggests that public discourses continue to play a powerful role in shaping the way women construct their feminine identities, this chapter continues to explore this problematic relationship through analysis of selected media texts. It also continues to address research question (iii) by considering how the media as a social institution, defined by Fairclough as comprising ‘ideological-discursive formations (IDFs) associated with different groups within the institution’ (2010: 30), represents and evaluates older women in a range of discourses; the analysis will explore the relationship between these discourses and the prevailing ‘age ideology’ (Gullette 1997: 3) as it is expressed through the plethora of images of female beauty which make up the visual landscape of contemporary life.

Chapter 3 explained the rationale for the selection of texts in this dataset. Whilst the number of texts is limited, the range is nonetheless sufficiently representative to allow meaningful explorations of current media attitudes. Section 7.1 examines three age-related discourses which catalyse participants’ complex attitudes towards ageing. Section 7.2 investigates the uncertainty expressed by a number of female participants regarding how to perform their femininity as they age by analysing representations of ageing femininity across a variety of media domains, considering how notions of glamour and display, central to the construction of stereotypical femininity, accommodate the ageing female body; and section 7.3 uses an example of transgressive ageing to examine the culturally embedded “rules” which seem to regulate the performance of ageing femininity.

7.1 Discourses of resistance, acceptance and ambivalence

The texts analysed here are sourced from different media modes which employ different rhetorical strategies (see Jeffries 2007) and communicative approaches in expressing attitudes towards ageing. Analysis focuses on how different semiotic modes are used to construct

evaluative stances and considers the role these visual and linguistic resources play in expressing the ideological meanings of wider culture (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 (2006), van Leeuwen 2005, also chapter 3 of this study). As the investigation will show, ageing is complex and conflicted territory, and this is reflected in the ambivalent nature of media attitudes towards the uncertain space between discourses of resistance and (seeming) acceptance. Selection of texts has been driven by themes which either have salience for participants and /or have been a focus of media interest at the time of analysis. Thus section 7.1.1 examines grey hair as a focus for gendered discourses of ageing; section 7.1.2 investigates the power of culturally constructed decadal markers as regulators of dress and behaviour; and section 7.1.3 looks at discourses of menopause.

7.1.1 The grey hair debate

For women of a certain age, when and how to go grey is a serious issue. (*Sunday Times Style Magazine* 28th April 2013)

The online vitriol against Mary Beard happened in part because long grey hair on a woman is too much for some to compute (Anouchka Grose, *The Guardian* online 25th January 2013)

These extracts, from different newspaper articles, exemplify complex and generally negative discourses which coalesce around grey hair and what it symbolises. In the *Sunday Times Magazine* extract, grey hair is evaluated as a ‘serious issue’ by the two male authors whilst *The Guardian*, discussing the internet trolling campaign against the historian Mary Beard constructs grey hair as a metonym for ‘culture’s negative assessment of old age’ (Woodward 1991: 66) through which ageing women are “othered”. The problematic issue of grey hair is a regular focus for participants’ discussions about ageing⁵⁶ and also appears to feature with greater frequency in media discourses, often as the subject of special features and reports. The texts analysed below, taken from the *Sunday Times Style Magazine* between 2010 and 2014 represent a small scale ‘inventory’ (van Leeuwen 2005: 6, see also chapter 3 of this study) of the semiotic resources used to construct evaluations of grey hair in a specific communicative context, illustrating different aspects of the media’s lens. The texts, ‘Glad to

⁵⁶ e.g. ‘I had a makeup lesson the other day in Harrod’s the woman.... said there’s no excuse for anybody to go grey nowadays... sometimes I think I should just let it but I can’t bear it really...’ [F13 56] in which the Harrods consultant characterises grey hair as an inexcusable act of ‘moral laxitude’ (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991: 179)

be Grey' (*Sunday Times Style Magazine* 3rd October 2010) and 'Silver Foxies' (*Sunday Times Style Magazine* 28th April 2013) are examples of a text type defined by Jeffries as 'how to texts' (2007: 40) i.e. procedural discourses giving advice and instructions to readers.

'Silver Foxies': right and wrong grey hair

The article 'Silver Foxies' is apparently authored by two male hair experts, Josh Wood (colourist) and John Vial (stylist), an assumption created by its composition: the image of the two men is placed above the headline, and the body text divided into 'John's advice' and 'Josh's advice', thereby signalling their personal ownership of the advice and judgements contained within it, locating the piece in the domain of male expertise and the male gaze. Throughout, the reader is addressed directly, using the second-person pronoun 'you', in ways which, as Jeffries argues, 'mak[es] it clear that the supposed reader is not only female, but is also in a particular category' (2007: 67), in this case older women whose appearance might be at risk because of grey hair:

Grey hair also changes texture, which can be a blessing if you have thin hair and want more volume but a nightmare if you want hair as sleek as the percussionist Evelyn Glennie's.

Furthermore, the implication is that these women might also be tempted to make inappropriate hair colour choices:

You can't constantly chase your youthful hair colour. If you are going to be a brunette from 0 to 60, somewhere along the line it won't suit you any more.

As part of its approach to the imagined reader, the article uses the rhetorical strategy of 'exemplary women' (Jeffries 2007: 53) - in this instance female celebrities - to provide positive examples of female grey hair. Once again, textual and visual modes combine to construct the evaluative stance for the reader; positively evaluative adjectives accompany the images of each celebrity i.e.:

SLEEK

Evelyn Glennie is the ultimate smooth operator

GORGEOUS

Jamie Lee Curtis with her effortless gamine crop

The women portrayed, aged 20s - 60s, all have versions of grey hair ranging from an artificially created fashion statement, in the case of the 20-something celebrities, to the "natural" version in the case of the older women. Most significantly all the women are already associated with glamour, known for their physical attractiveness, and shown in

obviously glamorised contexts (e.g. photo shoots, the catwalk, the red carpet). The images dominate the article as the first point of encounter for the reader, sending out an immediate visual message that grey hair is aspirational and high status, positioning it as not merely acceptable but glamorous, a positive fashion statement, the product of agentive choice rather than the disempowerment of ‘letting oneself go’. The body text gives a more ambivalent message, however, largely through use of adjectives which, as Jeffries notes ‘could easily be interpreted in the context as hyponyms of either *good* or *bad*’ (2007: 84). In this way the authors establish the notion of the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ grey hair:

Going grey is a statement. It’s about looking more chic or age-appropriate, but it doesn’t have to look boring, dull, frizzy or old.

Throughout the article, the lexis of the “desired state” of grey hair, (‘sleek’, ‘pearlised’ ‘gravitas’, ‘chic’), is juxtaposed with its evaluative opposite, (‘problematic’, ‘flat’, ‘dull’ ‘old’). The message to the assumed female reader appears to be that permission which at first seemed to be conferred on them to embrace their grey hair, (‘you can go grey and enhance the hair’...) is actually contingent on a complex regime of maintenance, necessary to avoid falling into the trap of the “wrong” grey hair:

Keeping grey hair looking good is high-maintenance. If you have a lot of frizzy grey hairs but want a sleek look, have a chemical relaxer done at your salon to smooth the texture...A rich, moisturising hair mask once a week will help with frizz, but the only way to really eliminate that is to blow-dry the hair with a big, fat, round brush.

Furthermore, once the decision to ‘age gracefully’ has been taken, even the effect of nature must be questioned:

It can come as a shock to many women, but their natural grey might not suit them...Now you can choose the exact grey to flatter your skin tone.

The anxiety-based nature of this narrative recalls that of some of the female-targeted skincare advertisements analysed in chapter 6; here the message is more covert, embedded within the seemingly celebratory tone of the article, as the headline and introductory text demonstrate:

Silver foxies

For women of a certain age, when and how to go grey is a serious issue. But you can age gracefully. Here’s how.

The headline ‘Silver foxies’ has a number of connotations; ‘foxies’ is a feminisation of the stereotypically gendered description ‘silver fox’, applied to greying/grey-haired men and generally positively evaluative. At another level, the adjective ‘foxy’ describes a sexually attractive woman, thus the epithet ‘silver foxies’ appears to offer the possibility of a different

ideological approach to female grey hair which incorporates sexual attractiveness, an impression further reinforced by the playful, youthful, slightly flirtatious connotation of the word in its diminutive⁵⁷ form ('foxies') placed alongside the images of attractive grey-haired women. However, once again authorial stance shifts with the immediate juxtaposition of the statement 'when and how to go grey is a serious issue', where the momentousness of the decision is reinforced by powerful lexical choices used in the body text: ('older women who want to be **taken seriously**'; 'grey is more **problematic**'; '...a **nightmare** if you want hair as sleek as... Evelyn Glennie's'). This is the language of obstacle, difficulty and challenge, presenting the decision to go grey as something not to be undertaken lightly. Repeated use of the modal 'can' reinforces the sense of qualified possibility; 'grey **can** be high fashion' (but only if you follow a complicated regime of care).

Thus the female reader is invited to contemplate 'the serious issue' of grey hair and its possible impact on femininity through the eyes of the male writers and the evaluative lens of male expertise. The construction of femininity on offer is complex; it can incorporate the 'right' sort of grey hair but only under certain conditions (i.e. complex regimes of maintenance), as a result of which it can be associated with a high status, high profile kind of glamour, or an artful naturalness where it can be seen as a transition marker from (youthful) frivolity to a sort of moral worthiness. Culturally endorsed discourses of female 'bodywork' (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 178), expressed through the anxiety-based tone and adjectival patterning (see Jeffries 2007), underpin the ideological positioning of the article which does not substantiate the challenge to conventional stereotypes of femininity implied by the title 'Silver foxies'. Rather it appears to endorse a notion of acceptable femininity based on 'the relentless pressure on women to maintain their appearance at a certain high standard' (Sontag 1978: 77), and also to subscribe to wider cultural ambivalence towards the visible signs of ageing in women. Sontag further commented that 'for most women, aging means a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification' (1972 (1978):75) and whilst the article's male gaze allows that the right kind of grey hair can be glamorous, or chic or even fashionable, it does not allow it to be sexy. A recent example of the penalties of having the "wrong" kind of grey hair is the public opprobrium attracted by the historian Mary Beard

⁵⁷ The diminutive form can also be construed as belittling, perhaps read as aspect of the tendency Wearing notes to 'girl' women (2007: 284), making girlishness part of the construction of femininity.

because of her appearance, but specifically focused on her trademark long, untidy grey hair. The powerfully negative evaluations Beard elicits are perhaps a consequence of the contradictions she embodies as an ageing woman in the public domain, which challenge and disturb the cultural visual repertoire (the media commentary on Beard has been analysed as a case history: Anderson, in preparation). In a *Guardian* article, the journalist Anouchka Grose (25th January 2013) argues that long hair has traditionally been a powerful cultural sign (which could be construed in the Saussurian sense) signifying femininity and sexuality. The fact that Beard's hair, whilst long, is grey and unkempt encodes a different set of associations which according to Grose both desexualise Beard and make her an object of suspicion:

the word 'witch'⁵⁸ comes up remarkably often in relation to this particular hairstyle [sc. Beard's long grey hair] (Anouchka Grose, *The Guardian* online, 25th January 2013)

Furthermore, Beard's stated resolution not to dye her hair seemingly flies in the face of culturally determined "rules" regarding the performance of femininity deemed appropriate for ageing women, as exemplified in the 'Silver foxies' article and discussed in section 7.3 below.

'Glad to be Grey': grey hair as sexy

By contrast, the article 'Glad to be Grey' (*Sunday Times Style Magazine* 3/10/2010) reframes the issue of grey hair for its male audience, thereby exemplifying the different ideological approach to age-related subjects taken by advertisers and the media when addressing male readers/consumers, a phenomenon discussed in chapter 6 with regard to male skincare advertisements. The introductory paragraph immediately and overtly contextualises grey hair in terms of sexual attractiveness:

Salt and pepper hair is **hot for men**. Ben Spriggs breathes a sigh of relief and hails the second coming of the silver fox.

Whereas going grey is discursively constructed as a 'serious issue' in the 'Silver foxies' article, here grey hair is referenced euphemistically as 'salt and pepper hair', mitigating its negative force and reducing the potential threat of 'grey' for the male audience. The tongue-in-cheek use of the phrase 'second coming' establishes a deliberately ironic and light-hearted linguistic framing for the message, which, as Coupland comments 'mimick[s] the syle of

⁵⁸ The (negatively evaluative) association between witches and ageing women is well established in literary and artistic domains; a recent example is the exhibition by Francisco Goya (Courtauld Gallery 26 February – 25 May 2015) 'The witches and Old Women Album' in which old women are depicted in a variety of grotesque and sinister representations.

‘blokey banter’, contrasting with the much more serious, committed and fear-based tone of women’s features and ads...’ (2007: 54). This bantering discourse style is the vehicle for the article’s real message to its male reader, which on an emotional level is to associate grey hair with triumphant selfhood, (‘...hails the second coming of the silver fox’) and through its linguistic construction seeks to soften the reality of grey-ness through minimising strategies (‘**a few** silvery strands’; ‘**a few** white hairs’), and descriptors, (‘silver flecks’, ‘snowy behind the ears’) selected for their accessible chumminess, in order to diffuse the (more serious) threat to physical attractiveness. Again, this discursive construction of male grey hair contrasts markedly with what has already been observed in approaches to the female reader (see above), where the threat to personal attractiveness is overtly and relentlessly articulated.

In constructing the communicative approach to its target audience, the article uses two rhetorical strategies: the first-person narrative as the voice of truth, as identified by Caldas-Coulthard (1996), manifested here as the voice of the writer; and secondly the use of celebrities as exemplary social actors (see Jeffries 2007), as exemplified in the ‘Silver foxies’ article analysed above. Thus the author Ben Spriggs constructs the article around a personal narrative whose discursive function is to provide readers with a ‘real’ - and by inference realistic rather than impossibly aspirational – perspective, inviting them to participate in his own journey from self-doubt to acceptance:

my new greyness garnered mixed reviews... Therein lies the conundrum when a young(ish) man tries to work out how to tackle the onset of salt-and pepper hair – is it hot or heinous....

Spriggs’ perceptual journey uses a number of linguistic devices to make it credible and appealing to readers: the personal ownership of the narrative in the first two paragraphs, expressed through the repeated use of ‘I’ and ‘my’ adds verisimilitude; the self-deprecating disclosure, (‘my male acquaintances called me “Grandpa”’), appeals to a sense of male community and imagined common experience. The images of exemplary men, all physically attractive celebrities, provide visual reinforcement of the textual message connecting sex appeal and grey hair. One of the celebrities supplies a direct quotation:

Lamb, a television presenter and radio DJ, now 30, first went grey at the tender age of 19. “I was lucky that David Ginola was a big star when I started going grey...He had made it acceptable...

The addition of George Lamb’s personal voice further builds on the message of reassurance to male readers, textually by humanising the experience of going grey, and visually by

allowing his evident physical confidence and charisma to communicate itself to readers. The author's progression from self-doubt to acceptance is achieved through a discursive shift in the gaze; he counterbalances the evaluations of 'the gaze of the Other' (Bartky 1990: 38, see also chapter 5 of this study) personified by his male friends, ('you'd think I had turned up in an Andy Warhol-style wig') with frequent quotations from two female 'experts', Catherine Hayward, fashion director of Esquire and Sarah Astley, men's hair specialist at a well-known London salon. Whereas in the 'Silver foxies' article the device of expert (male) commentary invites women to view female grey hair through the eyes not only of the 'imaginary male onlooker' (Messaris 1997: 41) but also through the negatively evaluative gaze of male expertise, here female voices offer the support and reassurance of the wider female gaze in the crucial domain of male heteronormative sexual attractiveness,

When men start greying at the temples, it creates that whole distinguished, marriage –material thing, and women love it

"Look at George Lamb," Hayward says. "He's young, stylish and charismatic – it's no wonder going grey is cool again."

Discourses of maintenance are subtly inferred rather than made explicit:

Rather than the helmet-head coverage of old, new formulations such as L'Oreal Paris Excell 5 subtly blends grey

The conclusion of the article, and by extension of the author's journey, is an endorsement - amounting to an exhortation - of grey hair in its natural state, via a direct quotation from the voice of the female fashion editor:

"Men won't be rushing to fake the grey. Besides, the real thing is far sexier".

This final word, offering a message of uncomplicated acceptance to male readers, is a long way from Furman's description of 'the revulsion inspired by the unimproved female body' (1997: 60) which seemingly underpins the anxiety-laden discourses of the 'Silver Foxies' article.

Thus analysis of the media gaze on grey hair suggests that not only is grey hair an immediate focus for the process of ageing, but the site of deeply gendered evaluations of ageing. For women, going grey is presented both through the male and the female gaze as a risky and momentous step, whose success is contingent on commitment to complex regimes of maintenance. Grey hair can be successfully accommodated within a notion of acceptable femininity but at the cost of sexual attractiveness, portrayed instead as a rite of passage

between youthful frivolity and the gravitas of maturity. The penalty for the “wrong” kind of grey hair is at best negative evaluation by ‘the gaze of the Other’, and at worst public excoriation, as demonstrated by the commentary on Mary Beard. ‘Glad to be Grey’ shows how the issue of grey hair can be reformulated for male audiences and evaluated by both the male and female gaze as not only low risk, but as potentially conferring an added dimension of sexual attractiveness and charisma.

7.1.2 The decade as a mechanism of evaluation

Justine Coupland (2009) charts changing perceptions of the decade from its historical significance as a means of ordering and formalising progression through the lifecourse to its more contemporary cultural appropriation as ‘an important unit of bodily ageing’ (2009: 953), particularly in discourses generated by the beauty and cosmetic industries, where it is frequently used as a means of introducing – and imposing – discourses of bodily control and improvement on consumers through exhortations to ‘look ten years younger’, ‘lose a decade’, etc. Numerous media discourses as well as the experiences of many participants in this study (see chapters 4 and 5) suggest that what Coupland terms ‘decade ageing mythology’ (2009: 960) is deeply embedded in evaluations of bodily ageing, also structuring how transitions through the lifecourse are measured and assessed. The decade as a unit of time has seemingly been so shaped by socio-cultural discourses of ageing that, as Coupland argues, its significance extends across all dimensions of ageing: chronological, personal, biological, social.

The text analysed here, ‘The 50-Plus Style Trial’ by writer and journalist Mandy Appleyard (*Daily Mail* 19th June 2013), typifies how the lifestyle media approaches - and makes use of - discourses of decadal age(ing), providing an opportunity to examine the ambivalent nature of culture’s relationship with the decade as a ‘perceptual isolate of time’ (Coupland 2009: 962), both shaping and shaped by cultural attitudes towards ageing. Twigg opines that ‘...journalists have a specific role to play as cultural mediators shaping the ways later years are presented, imagined and performed within a commercial culture’ (2013: 100) and, interestingly, the personal narrative is a frequently observed genre in this particular discourse domain, as writers use their own experiences to offer readers ‘.... the opportunity to see the ‘truth’ of someone else’s life’ (Caldas-Coulthard 1996: 250). Appleyard’s month long photo



diary, evaluating her daily wardrobe choices, is discursively framed by the notion of the decade as a watershed in which '50-plus' dress style is constructed as the transition marker from one lifestage to another, presented through the lens of Applebyard's own experience, then used as a vehicle for more general observations and evaluations aimed at the wider community of female readers. As Twigg also observes, the first person narrative, employed in this way, is a rhetorical device which

make[s] them sympathetic to the situations of older women, though at the same time retaining strongly 'realistic' views that implicitly endorse the ageist valuations of wider culture (2013: 101)

Applebyard uses textual and visual resources to construct her daily diary; each day's fashion choice is presented to readers as a series of small, numbered photographs each with a brief textual evaluation. Her opening paragraph establishes the evaluative framework for her discussion ('for a woman of 53...'), thereby setting up for readers the premise that clothing

and fashion beyond the milestone of 50 is territory which must be navigated with care. The binary nature of this evaluative framework is described in terms of the rewards and risks of “right” and “wrong” ageing, where the language of positive judgement (‘marvellously modern’) is juxtaposed with that of censure (‘hideously mutton’). Twigg makes a powerful connection between clothing and cultural perceptions of ageing and the ageing body, arguing that

clothing thus allows us to address the mediation between bodily and cultural forms of ageing, exploring how the culture of ageing is in part shaped by embodied experience, at the same time as addressing the ways cultural fields like dress play a part in the embodied constitution of age (2013: 6)

One of Appleyard’s conclusions on completing the photo diary is that ‘it’s not easy to get fashion right at 53’. Writing from a scholarly rather than journalistic perspective Twigg makes a similar observation, pointing out that

magazines aimed at this sector [sc. older people] see a significant part of their role as advising women how to negotiate what is seen as the tricky territory of later years (2013: 6)

The language of Appleyard’s self-evaluations illustrates the full extent of the ‘trickiness’ of the territory lying between ‘marvellously modern’ and ‘hideously mutton’. Different outfits are positively or negatively evaluated against a complex series of balances: degrees of youthfulness; degrees of display; ability to flatter or disguise the deficiencies of the body; stylishness versus frumpiness. In considering the role played by magazines as cultural mediators, Twigg also notes the complex navigations through which, according to culturally endorsed standards of acceptability, (older) women must be guided:

....showing them how to adjust their changing appearance to make it more acceptable, and by implication younger, and how to select clothes that are age-appropriate, not too young or too old, successfully displaying continuing engagement with the cultural practices of normative femininity (2013: 6)

Appleyard structures her descriptions of ‘successful’ dress as a series of positive statements each with a negatively evaluative counterbalance:

casual and youthful **but not muttonish**

this look is a great way for a woman my age to be stylish **but not ridiculously youthful**

it’s black so it hides a multitude of sins’; this floaty cream dress was perfect. **It covers all manner of flaws**

Thus even when an outfit is positively evaluated, it is counterbalanced by the language of the

deficient body:

This Next swimsuit **flatters** my boobs and shoulders.... Sarong **covers** my thighs. Result!

She evaluates all her bodily deficiencies as consequences of the ageing process, rather than as attributable to body shape, fitness etc; there are repeated references to ‘my baggy knees’; elsewhere she references ‘slightly wobbly upper arms’ and the more oblique but all-encompassing ‘multitude of sins’, in which the choice of the word ‘sin’ carries strong implications of ‘moral laxitude’ (Featherstone 1982 (1991): 178). Thus if Appleyard positively evaluates a dress choice it is generally despite rather than because of, a body which she monitors closely, but from which as Bartky (1990) argues, she is also distanced by imperatives of the ‘fashion-beauty complex (Bartky 1990: 40, see also chapter 4 of this study). Bartky’s argument, that a woman exists ‘perpetually at a distance from her physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval’ (ibid) appears to apply here and it could be argued that the writer’s own disapproving stance reflects the wider cultural posture of disapproval towards the ageing female body (see chapter 2 above). Therefore central to her definition of ‘getting fashion right at 53’ is the notion of disguise, of concealment of unacceptable signs of the body’s ageing (‘I **dared** to bare’; ‘sarong **covers** my thighs’; ‘**covers** all manner of flaws’), whilst still allowing the quest for acceptable youthfulness to continue. This again is visible in her choice of language:

... casual and **youthful but not muttonish**

As these extracts show, the word ‘youthful’ is often followed by a connective indicating the continual balance she deems necessary to make youthfulness acceptable.

Appleyard’s photo diary contains a number of fashion choices she evaluates in strongly negative terms. These perceived transgressions from the standards of appropriacy and acceptability have their genesis in more fundamental discourses concerning the relationship of dress to normative constructions of femininity; she assesses her own femininity in the context of how she thinks ageing femininity is judged externally:

Ahhh I wear this M & S skirt too much.... It’s **too tight and screams out ‘cougar’**

My friend persuaded me to wear this jade tasselled dress from H & M to a cocktail party. It’s way too short – and while it’s fun, I have to admit with **my wrinkly knees I look like mutton.**

I now realise I am **way too old for sparkle**

These evaluations centre around the notion of display: i.e. how much (and which parts) of the body can/should be revealed (see also section 7.2.1 below). Language choices indicate that as with other dress-related spectrums of judgement, the balance to be struck by the ageing woman is extremely complex. Clothes seen as too short are evaluated as ‘mutton’, too tight as ‘cougar’, and too showy by inference as the domain of the young (‘I am way too old for sparkle’). However, at the other end of the evaluative spectrum, clothing perceived to contravene the ‘youthful ideal that dominates dress codes’ (Twigg 2013: 20) is evaluated as ‘frumpy’. The language Appleyard chooses to describe her successful outfits, (‘stylish’, ‘age-appropriate’, ‘covers all manner of flaws’), suggests a construction of ageing femininity in which the body is concealed and de-sexualised (‘the cleavage is a definite danger area’); it could be argued that this reflects the wider cultural ambivalence concerning sexuality of the ageing female body (see Furman 1997, Twigg 2003, 2013, Coupland 2003, Gullette 1997, Woodward 1991) and its role in the construction of femininity. The conflicted relationship between display, sexuality, the ageing female body and cultural imperatives of youthfulness lies at the root of the complex double-bind afflicting older women (see section 7.2 below). As Twigg argues

... for older women there is greater discordance between their presentation and the youthful ideal that dominates dress codes and that is a crucial part of the constitution of femininity in the modern West (2013: 20)

Twigg contends that clothing and dress are fundamentally - and powerfully - gendered domains, and that cultural rules and requirements concerning age and dress are constructed differently for men, and differently dealt with in external discourses. Analysis of private and public discourses in this study, albeit limited, suggests that for women, the polarity of youth and age (see Woodward 1991) may be as great as the male/female polarity. Twigg builds her concept of ‘age ordering’ (2013: 25 and *passim*, see also chapter 2) on this premise, defining it as

a ... pattern of structured expectations, expressing norms about what is appropriate – or more significantly, inappropriate – for people as they age (*ibid*)

Twigg questions whether age ordering still exists in contemporary society; analysis of these media texts suggests that it still structures the evaluative mechanism of both subjective and external gaze, and, furthermore, is accepted and perpetuated by the female gaze. Thus the message to readers from accounts such as Appleyard’s reinforces Gullette’s argument that

women 'are aged by culture' (1997: 3), but also as ruthlessly by the judgements of other women.

7.1.3 Menopause and the menoboom: representations of mid-life and the ageing body

This section continues the discussion of evaluations of the ageing female body by considering discourses of the body in midlife, looking in particular at the impact of menopause both as it is evaluated through the subjective gaze and also as a discursively constructed product of wider cultural discourses relating to the body, gender, ageing and the lifecourse. Analysis focuses on a text from the lifestyle media, again a first person narrative authored by Mandy Appleyard (*Daily Mail* 28th October 2013), 'Welcome to my menopause nightmare'. By way of context, this text is examined alongside the work of two influential writers on menopause: Margaret Morganroth Gullette (1997) *Declining to Decline* and Germaine Greer (1991) *The Change*. Whilst Gullette argues that menopause is a cultural construct, 'a discursive phenomenon' (1997: 98) through which prevailing culture ages women, Greer reintroduces the historical designation of menopause as the 'climacteric' (1991: 25), a Greek term meaning 'critical period', as the basis for her argument that menopause *is* a critical life event for many women, but one which women need to reclaim from its appropriation by the male researchers and writers she collectively terms 'Masters in Menopause' (1991: 19). However, recent media commentary appears to suggest that the midlife – and indeed the menopause - is no longer considered to be an exclusively female domain, almost 20 years after Gullette questioned 'how do midlife men fit in?' (1997: 99). Thus an article about the male midlife by the author and journalist William Leith (*The Sunday Times Magazine* 18th June 2011) is referenced as a point of comparison.

Appleyard's personal narrative sits within a growing sub-genre which could be characterised as the personal midlife narrative presented to the external gaze, (see 2.3.3 of this study), a phenomenon which Featherstone and Hepworth (1988) argue is related to the tendency of postmodern culture to blur the boundaries between historically private spheres of life and public domains. Both Gullette's and Greer's work (see above) contains autobiographical elements; more recent examples include Jane Shilling's (2012) book *The Stranger in the Mirror* and Helen Walmsely-Johnson's (2015) account *The Invisible Woman*. Appleyard's

article – and other such accounts - suggests that the way midlife is experienced is inextricably interconnected with the phenomenon of the menopause. One of Gullette's central tenets is that women are culturally conditioned by the profusion of menopause discourses, which she collectively terms 'the menoboom' (1997: 98), to accept the cultural view which conflates midlife with menopause, thus creating a single narrative of decline which is fundamentally gendered, to which all bodily changes are ascribed:

If a man breaks a bone at forty, people say, "bad luck"; if a woman does, they tut-tut "osteoporosis". The culture fits *her* bone into a decline story. (Gullette 1997: 108)

Gullette argues that cultural discourses construct female ageing as a 'life-course decline narrative [which] require at its pivot a critical moment, an event' (1997: 98), contending that the menopause has become the 'critical moment' in the lives of midlife women, positioned as such by power of the 'menoboom', so that 'women [are] aged by culture' (1997: 99) more profoundly than by biology. Greer also notes that menopause has become 'big business' (1991: 18), commenting that the proliferation of menopause literature in recent decades has led to a level of media interest in the menopause which has generated a number of (generally negative) stereotypes, often rooted in the language of the diseased/deficient body, typically drawing on the semiotics of physical and emotional derangement. Greer writes that:

The menopausal woman is the prisoner of a stereotype and will not be rescued from it until she has begun to tell her own story. (1991: 18)

These viewpoints contextualise the analysis of Appleyard's narrative (shown below) in which she tells the story of her personal menopause experience much as Greer is advocating.

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Welcome to my menopause nightmare:
She's wrinkling like a prune, sweating like a bull - and going to bed with a man has never been so scary! A brutally honest yet life-affirming account of the menopause

- Mandy Appleyard's having a rough time of it
- The side-effects of her menopause are deeply uncomfortable...
- Especially as she's begun a new relationship
- In a new column, read about Mandy's experience of the menopause

By MANDY APPELYARD

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Strange things are happening to me in the night. It used to be one night every so often, but now it's every night.

I go to bed looking like the normal me, straight-haired and smooth-faced, but I wake up (note: I haven't actually slept for more than about four hours so I use the term loosely) looking as if I'm wearing a fright wig and with my face so puffy that I look as though I've been fighting ten rounds with a man with large fists.

Night sweats are to blame. Each night I toss and turn, my hair wet with sweat before being tumble-dried in a tangle of sheets and pillows. Come Sam, I look like one of the Jackson Five.

All this started about a year ago. Where I used to read for 30 minutes, switch off the light and wake up eight hours later feeling thoroughly refreshed, bedtime is now a marathon of insomnia and discomfort which leaves me feeling as if I never actually sleep.

Welcome to my menopause.

When, about two years ago, my doctor told me I was peri-menopausal, I ran home to consult my Family Health Encyclopedia and blanched as I read the common symptoms of menopause.

Hot flushes and night sweats; loss of libido (sexual desire); vaginal dryness and pain; itching or discomfort during sex; palpitations; headaches; mood changes such as depression, anxiety or tiredness; sleeping problems including insomnia; urinary tract infections.

Oh joy! Here I am, 53 years old, wrinkling faster than a plum in the sun, hair thinning, more life behind me than in front of me - and now a fresh hell of decline to anticipate.

When my menopause started, I was single and wondering whether I would ever have sex again. Even if I were lucky enough to meet a needle in life's haystack at this 11th hour, I questioned whether I could bear to be seen naked by a man now that I am giggling, reeking and creasing.

More to the point, assuming that this man were my age or thereabouts, how would I feel when confronted with the balding, bloated, varicosed reality of sex after 50?

Then I started seeing Adam, who is not balding, bloated nor varicosed. Since he's the same age as me and has known me for about 30 years, I suppose he realised he was turning up at the party just as the drink ran out - but, happily, that hasn't got in our way.



Welcome to my menopause: Mandy is experiencing some hair-thinning and enduring severe night sweats

The semiotic resources she uses to present her experiences to readers and the evaluative stance she constructs give insights into the influence of menopause stereotypes on individual discourse. The article uses number of devices to position readers at the first point of encounter, although interestingly, the way images and text are used offers a somewhat contradictory stance to readers.

The headline/introductory statements, prominently positioned, are used in combination with an image of the author which far from reinforcing the textual message, adds a visual dimension which seems to work in subtle opposition to it. Thus a full-body image of Appleyard smiling confidently at the reader, wearing a tight-fitting cocktail dress and high heels, is positioned next to a headline inviting the reader directly into her 'menopause nightmare'. As Matheson (2005) argues, direct address has the effect of positioning/aligning the reader as the audience for a particular authorial standpoint – in this case Appleyard's evaluation of her feminine identity. Even before the reader-as-audience has had an opportunity to engage with the article's content, the combination of visual and verbal semiotic resources encodes a number of ideological assumptions: menopause is positioned in Gullette's words 'as a major life event' (1997: 98), discursively constructed as if it were a

personal catastrophe, through the upscaled negatively evaluative lexical choices ('hell', 'nightmare', 'scary'); by conflating physical ageing and menopause ('she's wrinkling like a prune and sweating like a bull'), all changes to the body are attributed to this single phenomenon; Appleyard's confidently smiling image implies that this is an experience with a tangible end, with the possibility of happiness and fulfilment post-menopause, (although there is a further disjunction with the headline which presents her menopause as a 'nightmare' which is still ongoing).

The article written from/about a male perspective offers an interesting basis for comparison. William Leith's narrative, rather than using a headline as conventionally defined, is formatted as a double-page spread, the first page featuring a close-up of his (clearly ageing) face and the second offering a direct quotation, presumed to be from him, which acts as a lead-in to the article:

I am grey.
My skin is mottled.
I have a double chin.
I have broken veins.
I look tired, pouchy.
My teeth need work.
Still, I don't suffer from erectile dysfunction....

Interestingly, the detailed and deconstructed nature of this self-evaluation, with its focus on individual body parts is more commonly encountered as a feature of the female gaze on their own bodies (see 5.1.3 of this study) and of the media gaze on women's ageing (see Furman 1997, Jeffries 2007, see also chapter 6). The imagined audience may well be familiar with the female midlife ageing narrative as a text type, (see Jeffries 2007 also above) usually constructed around negative evaluations of women's visible signs of ageing. However, the fact that this is a narrative of male ageing, produced by the male gaze for an external gaze which may be male as well as female, changes the evaluative perspective in that unusually, readers are invited to view a male ageing body through the subjective gaze of its male owner. The incursion into linguistic territory more commonly associated with female ageing is further reinforced by an anonymous authorial voice informing the reader that Leith's self-evaluation has been triggered by a personal mirror moment:

At 51, the writer William Leith is horrified by what he sees in the mirror. Lamenting his loss of youth, he casts a critical eye over his body and resolves to take action. But is it too late?

Analysis in chapter 5 of this study suggests that the mirror moment is a defining aspect of female ageing and that men have a different relationship with the mirror based more on self-acceptance than criticism; Leith's horrified reaction at what he sees in the mirror once again disrupts the reader's evaluative perspective. The presence of an unattributed external voice in what is clearly a deeply personal narrative acts as a seemingly objective confirmation of the writer's subjective experience, endorsing his reaction to what is reflected in the mirror. There may even be an implicit comparison intended with female narratives of midlife ageing as discussed above, in which the women writers' subjective gaze on their personal experience of ageing is clearly mediated by the 'critical moment' (Gullette 1997: 98) of menopause. The absence of the pre-defined cultural script of menopause/midlife to apply to his own ageing process means that Leith finds himself adrift in a state of 'midlife helplessness' (Gullette 1997:146), conveyed by the brutal self-assessment of his opening words. Although cultural perceptions of masculinity are in the process of shifting as men are also increasingly targeted by youth-centric discourses, there remains a relative lack of culturally acceptable/accepted fora in which intimate aspects of male ageing can be explored, which throws Leith's predicament as a midlife man into sharper relief. However, media commentary on the male midlife, although far less developed than the proliferation of female menopause literature, has begun in recent years to raise the possibility that as with women's ageing, the male midlife may be sufficiently problematic to warrant a name and a "diagnosis" e.g. 'andropause' (*The Guardian* online 28th September 2010) and its more popular translation as the 'manopause'.

The language Appleyard uses throughout her account is a product of prevailing cultural menopause ideology as it is expressed in menopause discourses which feature regularly in the media, e.g. menopause as the origin of all negative bodily changes; menopause as illness; menopause as the defining and dividing event in the lifecourse. Thus Appleyard's description of the changes she perceives in her body is powerfully negative:

Here I am, 53 years old, **wrinkling** faster than a plum in the sun, hair thinning, more life behind me than in front of me – and now a **fresh hell of decline** to contemplate

Physical signs of ageing are not only conflated with unattractiveness, ('wrinkling faster than a plum'), but also constructed as harbingers of inevitable, nightmarish decrepitude ('a **fresh hell of decline**'). She expresses her most profound insecurities about the changes to her body

in terms of loss: of fertility, youthfulness, and sexual attractiveness, using personification to intensify her sense of what has been taken away from her physically:

My friend jokes that she's been the victim of 'The Menopause Thief': **he's** taken her figure, quite a bit of her hair, her sex drive, and what she describes as 'my sense of myself as a woman'. I know what she means. **He's** taken quite a few bits of me too.

Significantly, 'the Menopause Thief' is given a male persona, perhaps illustrating Greer's argument that this essentially female physical phenomenon has traditionally been appropriated and somehow owned by men. Appleyard's deconstructed approach to her body ('he's taken quite **a few bits** of me too') is also significant, typifying the relationship women have with their bodies as objects made up of a selection of parts, the sum of which is less than the whole (see chapter 5 of this study). Furthermore, in the course of her narrative, Appleyard often evaluates her bodily changes using the language of illness:

I ran home to consult my Family Health Encyclopaedia and blanched as I read the common symptoms of menopause. Hot flushes and night sweats; palpitations; headaches

This locates menopause in the domain of disease, rather than of "normal" bodily process; the conflation of 'symptoms' of menopause with 'symptoms' of ageing not only creates a single narrative of decline but also perpetuates a wider tendency to medicalise natural bodily changes (see 2.3.3 above); similarly, the common stereotype of menopause-as-madness, which Appleyard draws on, historically forms part of the medicalised discourses of a disordered body. Greer references a 1975 medical survey in which the (male) authors concluded that:

it is clear that for many women the menopause is a period of disorientation, physical problems and psychological imbalance (IHF (AKZO) survey 1975:49, cited in Greer 1991: 19)

Appleyard uses the language of disorientation to establish the context for her narrative:

Strange things are happening to me in the night. I go to bed looking like the normal me, straight-haired and smoothish-faced, but I wake up...looking as if I'm wearing a **fright wig**...

She contrasts her state of normality, characterised by the language of order, ('straight-haired', 'smooth-faced') with the domain of 'strange things' which finds physical manifestation in the reference to 'fright wig' with its visual associations with bizarre and alarming stereotypes of madness. Whilst this is not literally a narrative of madness, and is intended to be slightly tongue-in-cheek, what Appleyard is expressing is the sense of being a stranger in her own body – perhaps intensified by the pervasive presence of these cultural meta-messages. However, Appleyard's greatest struggle with her changing body is rooted in culturally embedded perceptions of menopause as a desexualising force; according to Greer this is

another aspect of menopause mythology, originating in the male-generated essentialist discourses which produced the cultural equation of fertility=femininity=sexual attractiveness. De Beauvoir held up these discourses of biologism which traditionally defined womanhood, in order to ridicule them:

Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her. (de Beauvoir 1949, (1997): 35)

It is significant, however, that when writing about the menopause she also used the language of biologism:

It is sometimes said that women of a certain age constitute ‘a third sex’; and in truth, while they are not males, they are no longer females. (ibid)

Within the complex conjunction of sex, gender and sexuality discussed in chapter 2 of this study, the effect of categorising (post)menopausal women as ‘a third sex’ is to degender as well as desexualise them. Appleyard’s own experience of the intersection of ageing and sexuality is couched in powerfully negative language:

When my menopause first started, I was single and wondering whether I would ever have sex again. Even if I was lucky enough to find a needle in life’s haystack at this 11th hour, I questioned whether I could bear to be seen naked by a man now that I am sagging, receding and creasing.

Evaluating her ageing body and feelings about her sexual attractiveness, (‘I questioned whether I could bear to be seen naked...now that I am sagging, receding and creasing’) she uses temporal references (‘now’, ‘at this 11th hour’) implicitly contrasting her current insecurities with earlier phases in her life, in which the unquestioned assumption is that sexual confidence is a consequence of youthfulness. The interrelationship between menopause and the notion of femininity can be observed in Appleyard’s angst-ridden account of stratagems she employs in order to preserve her self-image with her new partner:

... there are some other significant physical changes going on for me. When Adam stays over, I make sure my make up is strategically placed ... so that before he’s even awake I can... slather on what’s needed, this side of 50, so as not to look like a dying old crone in a Dickens novel.

Greer decouples femininity and femaleness, stating that:

what women in the climacteric are afraid of losing is not femininity, which can always be faked and probably is always fake, but femaleness... (1991:59)

However, Appleyard’s account suggests that for her, femininity and femaleness are intimately interconnected; she fears the loss of libido as much as she fears revealing her unadorned 50 year-old face. Through her ‘continuing investment in the insignia of a gendered

body' (Woodward 1991:3) such as the make-up she 'slathers on ... so as not to look like a dying old crone', she sustains a feminine self which is bound up with a socially constructed notion of youthfulness, and central to her sense of *female* self. Greer challenges the notion of femininity, 'if femininity is real, it should amount to more than a streak of khol and a squirt of scent' (1991: 58), subsequently dismissing it as superficial fakery, 'a charade' (1991: 59). It could be argued that Greer's use of 'should' in challenging cultural stereotypes of femininity signifies a pressure to conform to a different kind of stereotype, which for her involves eschewing the 'perpetual girlishness called femininity' (1991: 59) for the 'self-defining female energy' (ibid) of femaleness, and her argument both generalises and homogenises women's experience. Appleyard's narrative, as well as the accounts of female midlife participants in this study, shows that the relationship between femininity and femaleness is complex, individual, and co-dependent; for these women, the dimension of identity where notions of gender and sexual attractiveness intersect is where the desexualising potential of the menopause is most keenly felt. It is striking that William Leith also openly expresses his own fears about loss of sexual potency ('I am mourning the passing of the age when nature thought I was good to reproduce'), a view which cuts across cultural discourses which have historically denied male ageing; as Gullette comments 'that men age is truly a taboo subject' (1997: 106). Whilst in one sense the narratives of Appleyard and Leith suggest that there is a kind of equality in the way in which physical changes affect the ageing female and male body irrespective of gender, how both writers understand the signs of ageing as transition markers, and consequently evaluate the midlife in relation to other lifestages has everything to do with the fundamentally gendered nature of cultural constructions of midlife.

Appleyard's account exemplifies a common linguistic feature of such midlife narratives which is to conceptualise the lifecourse in terms of a binary division into 'before' and 'after': 'before' describes the pre-midlife period and is generally positively evaluated, defined by (relative) youthfulness, sexual and physical attractiveness and fertility; 'after' represents the post-midlife phase, generally negatively evaluated, viewed as the entrance into old(er) age and therefore synonymous with decline, defined by loss of libido, attractiveness, fertility. The menopause is what marks the symbolic as well as physical division between 'before' and

‘after’, as Appleyard’s concluding words demonstrate:

As we say goodbye to our fertility and hello to life beyond it, we are battling through a difficult lifestage...

Gullette’s premise is that it is the power of cultural discourses which construct the menopause as ‘the marker that divides a younger woman from herself growing older and divides midlife men from same age women’ (1997: 102), by creating a false and needlessly momentous division in the ‘subtle continuum of age’ (Woodward 1991: 6). In terms of life after the menopausal divide, there is a powerful ‘“after-is-better” rhetoric’ (Gullette 1997: 103) in literary as well as media discourses, exemplified by Greer’s conceptualisation of life post-menopause:

The object of facing up squarely to the fact of the climacteric is to acquire serenity and power. If women on the youthful side of the climacteric could glimpse what this state of peaceful potency might be, the difficulties of making the transition would be less. (1991: 9)

The effect of linguistic encapsulations such as ‘serenity and power’ and ‘peaceful potency’ is to suggest that individual experience, with all its potential messiness and diversity, can somehow be sanitised and homogenised through the transformative power of the menopausal transition. Indeed the after-is-better discourse may even constitute as much of a stereotype as the menopause-is-hell rhetoric; both are indicative of the depth of entrenchment as well as the binary nature of cultural attitudes towards menopause. Gullette argues that after-is-better discourses serve to ‘reinforce the marker event’ (1997: 103) as much as the pessimism which precedes it; thus embedded notions of ‘before’ and ‘after’ continue the culturally constructed expectation that discontinuity and disruption to the lifecourse are inevitable consequences of menopause. Appleyard’s account, as representative of such personal narratives, suggests that even as women tell their own stories as Greer advocates, far from breaking free of such stereotypes, they actively perpetuate them, falling back on the language of culturally generated menopause discourses to provide structure and explanation for their personal experiences, both pre- and post-menopause. Thus the menopause experience continues to be viewed as a pre-ordained sequence of ‘before’ and ‘after’, divided by a momentous transitional event in which linguistically, ‘before’ is described in the language of nightmare, illness and madness, leading up to a transition, conceptualised in spatial terms as a tangible “event”, to a post-menopausal state evaluated using the generic language of optimism, serenity and reinvention.

Based on this analysis it can be argued that menopause discourse continues to be deeply influential for the way in which women such as Appleyard, representatives of a wider female community, construct their age identity. Here perhaps lies the real complexity - and ambivalence - of menopause as a personal and cultural experience: prevailing culture encodes its attitudes to ageing women through menopause discourses; women are as disadvantaged by the pervasive presence of the cultural script which defines their experience as men may be by the absence of a correspondingly defining event. The power of the cultural menopause discourse determines that most women will evaluate their midlife experience as the gateway to decline, whilst at the same time providing a reason and an explanation which is lacking for men, even as male ageing becomes discursively more visible. Also lacking for men is the promise of an idealised resolution to the midlife/menopause experience. In reality, such 'after-is-better' rhetoric may add further pressure to a cultural script which seemingly subsumes women's individual experiences whilst providing little context for that of men. Taken together, the texts analysed here allow a more nuanced exploration of Sontag's 'double standard about aging' (1972 (1978): 73); as cultural perceptions and expectations of masculinity shift, it may be that the double standard which has traditionally worked to the particular disadvantage of women, is also increasingly afflicting men. Gullette argues strongly for the need to challenge and override 'both the biologism and the pessimism of the menoboom' (1997: 103), and perhaps also, it could be argued, the counterbalancing expectation of resolution. Appleyard's experience, as well as that of some of the midlife female participants in this study, suggests that Gullette's exhortation to return menopause to its more proportional place as a component in 'a whole life story, or better yet, since women need to be reinscribed as indelibly diverse, in many different whole life stories' (ibid: 102), is far from being realised.

Analysis so far suggests that cultural attitudes to female ageing are complex, and characterised by an ambivalence which Woodward (1991, 2006) argues is expressed through a lack of representation of older women in public discourses. She writes that 'it would seem that the wish of our visual culture is to erase the older female body from view' (2006:163). Using strikingly similar language, Fiona Mactaggart, MP and secretary of the Commission on Older Women, presenting at the launch of the Charter against Ageism and Sexism in the Media (3rd October 2013) commented that older women tend to be 'disappeared' by media

discourses. In the context of such cultural attitudes, the following analysis of a range of media representations of older women examines how ageing women are represented visually and discursively, and evaluated in the context of dominant cultural expectations of acceptable femininity.

7.2 Representations of femininity: idealised, ageing, transgressive

The postmenopausal body, having lost its reproductive (and by implication, sexual) charm, neither is the object of the appreciative male gaze nor does it fit into contemporary cultural discourses about “ideal” female beauty (Markson 2003: 80)

Section 7.1.3 shows that the postmenopausal body is an ambivalent object of the cultural gaze but also of the female gaze. The above extract from Elizabeth Markson’s paper examining the ageing female body through the medium of film, considers differences in the cultural view of male and female ageing, arguing that an important factor in negative evaluations of the ageing female body is that it ceases to be the object of the male gaze. This part of the analysis examines the cultural script as it relates to the female body, ageing ‘under the watchful gaze of a world awash in perfect bodies’ (Faircloth 2003: 11), using a range of textual and visual representations of women to explore deeper questions concerning the complex conjunction of cultural attitudes towards gender, femininity and sexuality as they intersect with the ageing female body. The analysis considers how ageing femininity is represented and discursively evaluated; what this reveals about cultural ‘rules’ governing acceptable female ageing; the different identities offered to older women; and consequently what insights can be gained about cultural attitudes to ageing women.

7.2.1 Glamour, display and the construction of femininity

As outlined in chapter 3, this dataset used here is a small scale survey of women’s monthly magazines: *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire*, aimed at a younger readership and *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home* targetting older readers. The investigation looked specifically at Christmas/ New Year 2012 and summer 2013 editions of these magazines, aiming to use these two distinct periods in the year, which have particular salience for body and appearance related discourses, in conjunction with the magazines’ different age profiles, to explore the interrelated concepts of glamour and display as indices of cultural requirements of age-graded femininity. In addition to the seasonal/occasion-driven discourses of the front

covers, the editorial content of the inside pages was examined in order to understand and compare the day-to-day constructions of femininity offered by the magazines to their readers.

The notion of glamour, generally appropriated by the Christmas/New Year issues, is expressed through commonly used – and stereotypical – combinations of visual and verbal semiotic resources, i.e. sequinned dresses and sparkling jewellery, and the vocabulary of glamour ('sparkle', 'celebrate' 'glamorous you'). In a similar way the concept of display - how and to what extent the body is revealed to the external gaze – more visually associated with the summer holiday season, shares a common textual/visual language expressed through full body shots of models wearing bikinis/skimpy beachwear together with discourses of body improvement (e.g. 'Beach Body Ready', 'Get Body Confident'). The magazines' age profiles are significant in determining how each publication interprets glamour and display and accommodates these concepts within the construction of femininity offered to their readers. An additional strategy employed by all magazines in the survey is the use of celebrities as 'exemplary women' (Jeffries 2007: 53, see also chapter 6 of this study and section 7.1.1 above) on their front covers, with follow-up features in the body of the magazine; choice of celebrity has an important role to play as a vehicle through which each magazine communicates its ideological approach to femininity to readers. This is exemplified in three comparative case studies below.

Nicole Scherzinger: youthful glamour

Marie Claire features Nicole Scherzinger on the front cover of its Christmas issue.



Aged 34, she exactly matches the magazine's core reader age profile (see 3.1.3 above). Scherzinger is also designated the 'Ultimate Fun, Fearless Female' in *Cosmopolitan's* Ultimate Women Awards 2012, thus reinforcing both her media presence and credentials as an icon of youthful femininity. As discussed in 6.2 above, Williamson (1978) deconstructs the advertising strategy of using celebrity role models, arguing that it is designed to set up a process whereby image and message are linked in the mind of the reader, enabling values readers already associate with a particular celebrity (i.e. Scherzinger's youthful beauty and sexiness) to be appropriated by advertisers and transferred to what is being 'sold' – in this case the *Marie Claire* brand of glamour. Thus with the reader's unconscious collaboration, glamorous sexiness is presented as the natural, rightful and unquestioned territory of youth. Scherzinger is shown wearing an elaborate, opulent dress whose sheer, black fabric allows glimpses of skin and contours of the body beneath. The combination of concealment and subtle display, together with her pose, in which one arm is crossed protectively across her body whilst her chin rests thoughtfully on her other hand, bring an element of vulnerability to her performance of glamour. *Marie Claire's* July issue, which features a front cover shot of Alicia Keys, plays the same game of concealing-revealing; she is shown wearing a flowing, draped dress which appears to conceal the contours of her body but which is slashed diagonally from collar to waist and thigh to ankle. Both front covers juxtapose images and text to reinforce the interconnectedness of sexuality and glamour in these representations of femininity. Christmas party glamour draws from a particular group of vocabulary; the front cover headline positioned across Scherzinger's body reads:

Christmas Glamour

Look **Hot** in **Sparkling** Make-up, **Sexy** Heels & **Fabulous** Fashion

Thus she appears as the manifestation of a femininity based on sexualisation of glamour and glamorisation of sexuality, linguistically expressed through adjectival patterning: 'hot', 'sparkling', 'sexy', 'fabulous'. Such textual realisations, intended as general invitations to readers, are located in the same visual field as the social actor so that a connection is established for the reader/viewer between signifier (Scherzinger) and what is signified (glamour/sexiness).

A key consideration for the analysis is how these seasonally driven discourses of glamour and display are applied to older women, and what insights can be gained as a consequence

regarding cultural attitudes to ageing femininity. As ideological encapsulations, the front covers of *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home* have a different set of balances to achieve in addressing a significantly older readership than that of *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* (see above and 3.1.3). They must accommodate the notion of glamour, as befits the discursive conventions of the Christmas party/summer holiday season, in a way which is appropriate yet still sufficiently aspirational.

Nigella Lawson: qualified glamour

The following example from *Good Housekeeping* suggests that the need to navigate these complex balances necessarily may produce a more nuanced portrayal of glamour. The front cover features a full body shot of celebrity chef and author Nigella Lawson, against a red background (see below):



She sits on a stool luxuriously draped with red fabric, one arm resting on the gilded back of an ornate chair. Part of a highly decorated Christmas tree is visible in the background behind her left shoulder. Lawson's white gown creates a striking visual contrast with the rich red and gold tones of the background, but also establishes strong cohesion with many of the textual elements on the front cover e.g. 'From the heart', 'Totally traditional stress-free feast'.

Lawson, in her early 50s, is considered to be a beautiful woman; her physical capital - long glossy hair, striking brown eyes and voluptuous body - is used to communicate an aspirational message of glamour which is at the same time modified by a number of visual strategies to make it age-appropriate and non-threatening: the choice of white for her dress with its obvious connotations of purity and virginity minimises any suggestion of sexiness; she is contextualised by the semiotics of Christmas and home, e.g. Christmas tree and the chair, suggesting the privacy of the domestic domain; her seated pose, connoting the party hostess sitting at her own table, further reinforces the impression of cosy domesticity, perhaps setting up an echo in readers' minds of her self-described persona as the 'domestic goddess'. Visual juxtapositions with the different textual elements ('recipes and ideas', 'from the heart', 'stress free feast') further locate her in the domain of home, family, hearth and kitchen. In this way, Lawson's inherent glamour and sexual attractiveness is toned down to make her an acceptable embodiment of older femininity. The idea of acceptability, itself an ambivalent notion, rests on a greater cultural ambivalence regarding sexuality and its role in the construction of ageing femininity. As Anne Karpf comments in the context of her writing on older female models, 'in our culture, sexiness in older women is disturbing' (*The Guardian Weekend*, 22nd February 2014). Lawson represents a more complex construction of femininity than Scherzinger in terms of the way in which discourses of ageing, appearance and sexuality are balanced. Lawson's glamour and sexuality are toned down, and her domestic credentials invoked, using visual and textual cues designed to give her accessibility as well as maintaining her status as an aspirational figure. As Woodward (2006) comments, there are clear tensions inherent in the way in which 'age and gender structure each other in a complex set of reverberating feedback loops' (2006: 163); thus cultural rules which stipulate 'the appropriate way to "be" an old(er) woman...' (Railton and Watson 2012: 212), dictate that Lawson as the exemplary older woman is only allowed a carefully modified kind of glamour in which sexual attractiveness has little place.

Debbie Harry: an ambivalent icon

When magazines with a younger demographic choose to feature older women, whilst ostensibly delivering a positive evaluation of ageing femininity, sometimes the real message sent out to readers reinforces the ideology of youthful femininity as the ideal. This is exemplified by a feature in *Marie Claire's* July 2013 edition about the iconic pop star Debbie

Harry, now aged 68, which reveals a deeper - perhaps unintended - ambivalence towards ageing.



The article runs across three full-page spreads leading with an image of Harry at the height of her fame - and beauty - in the late 70s. The language of the introductory paragraph suggests that the article was intended as a survival narrative, a tribute to the endurance of unapologetic and glamorous transgressiveness:

She took *Top of the Pops* by storm with her peroxide beauty and feisty attitude. And three decades later, the Blondie frontwoman still inspires awe. We are not worthy.

The montage of images shown above visually documents her transition from fresh-faced 20-something pre-Blondie, to her incarnation as the embodiment of a glamour which challenged the conventions of femininity of the period: powerful, independent, provocative and sexually overt; interestingly, the unspecific yet inclusive nature of 'we' in the extract above, as Matheson (2005) observes, is another device for positioning readers, implicitly aligning them with the magazine's construction of Harry's feminine identity. Textually however, the narrative is one of insecurity and the 'dark glamour' of drug addiction and destructive relationships, culminating in her personal evaluation of the ageing process:

She's unapologetic about her cosmetic surgery...but admits that getting older isn't easy for an icon. **'As far as ageing goes, it's rough. I'm trying my best now. I exercise like a fiend and do that stuff that recovered addicts do'** (my bold).

The combination of images and text encode complex and contradictory messages. Harry's evaluation of her own ageing process is negative and regretful ('it's rough') and her attitude to cosmetic surgery, ('I've done everything and will continue to do everything') says less about defiance and more about denial. On the final page of the article, a contemporary

photograph of Harry aged in her sixties is placed amongst a selection of images of her at her zenith. The comparison forced by this juxtaposition (see below) is to the disadvantage of the older Harry whose peroxide hair, red lipstick and plasticised features suggest an inability to relinquish the accoutrements of her younger self, and instead present a somewhat poignant echo of the powerfully sexual and iconoclastic femininity through which she defined herself and was in turn defined.



The article's commentary perhaps unintentionally reinforces this:

Harry may be 68, but you can still see the girl with the razor cheekbones and heart-shaped pout who stood on the tiny stage of New York's CBGB festivals....

The qualifying 'still' expresses the fundamental ambivalence of the writer as the voice of wider culture, towards ageing, and ageing femininity in particular; it prevents Harry being viewed simply as an attractive 68 year-old woman by suggesting that the implicit (negative) comparison with her youthful beauty is what defines her as an older woman. The author's comment 'you can still see the girl with the razor cheekbones...' contains a sense of Featherstone and Hepworth's concept of 'the mask of ageing' (1988 (1991): 379) in which the youthful person has almost been submerged beneath the mask-like concealment of age. The article's intended tribute to Harry's 'glamour and grit' in the end offers an ambivalent portrayal of ageing femininity, presenting it comparatively in terms of loss after the pinnacle (see chapter 4 above). Harry's final words express this ambivalence:

You may not be happy about going to your end but, hey, at least I can say I flogged it while I had it.

If the front cover encodes the magazine's ideological approach, setting the discursive tone for readers, the inner pages reinforce it in more detailed exploration of fashion features and editorial content. A comparison of fashion features from *Cosmopolitan* and *Woman & Home* demonstrates how each magazine's construction of femininity is expressed as a cohesive discourse.



Cosmopolitan's regular fashion feature, the 'Look Book', exemplifies the sexually confident, defiant feminine identity offered to its readers (see Machin and van Leeuwen 2007), using a model in her early 20s, with an introductory paragraph promising

Fashion

Your dusk-till-dawn **lust-haves**, party must-haves and **sure-fire sexy hits** for the festive season

Vocabulary choices ('lust-haves', 'sure-fire sexy hits') associate the "right" party wear with the goal of achieving sexual conquest; furthermore, the modal 'must-have' and its playful parody 'lust-haves', send a message to readers that whilst sexual adventure can be viewed casually, dressing appropriately for it is almost an obligation. The focus of these seasonal fashion pages is on preparing readers for the necessity of display e.g.:

A little red dress will keep you the centre of attention at any party

Get ready to shine in a smattering of sequins and plenty of glitter

The way different semiotic resources are used illustrates the complex and contradictory nature of culturally defined practices of acceptable femininity; as Sontag argues, cultural standards impose on women the duty look in the mirror whilst simultaneously characterising

this as narcissism (see 5.2.2 above) and yet as these magazine features demonstrate, ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (Mulvey 2009: 19) is the leitmotif of the message to the reader. Older women (i.e. 35+) are generally not represented in the fashion pages of either *Cosmopolitan* or *Marie Claire*; ageing appearance is addressed via a limited number of skincare advertisements which frame their message in ways which offer least disruption to the construction of youthful femininity, e.g. *Marie Claire*’s July 2013 edition features a number of advertisements which do not have a social actor, such as Olay Regenerist. These anti-ageing advertising messages account for a small proportion of the overall advertising content of these magazines, the majority of which focus on discourses of body maintenance and enhancement through beauty and cosmetic advertising. The implicit message to the reader is that the ageing appearance is a distant reality which need not disrupt ‘the prestige of youth’ (Sontag 1972 (1978): 73), but that at the same time, as Sontag further argues, the construction of an acceptable feminine identity is presented as an aspect of female duty, necessary components of which - sexualised glamour, overt display, and youthfulness - are presented as ‘an alreadyness of facts’ (Williamson 1978: 44).

By way of contrast, the December issue of *Woman & Home* exemplifies how glamour is interpreted and expressed visually and linguistically for an older female consumer.



Ten women aged 36 - 66 are featured across two double-page spreads, in the first one wearing black party dresses (n.b. LBD = Little Black Dress), and in the second in gold/metallic outfits. One of the most significant differences between this and

Cosmopolitan's 'Look Book' lies in the discursive framing. Each section of the article is introduced by a headline which is procedural in its linguistic construction e.g.:

10 take on the LBD

Anything goes, as long as it's black! The classic LBD is virtually comfort dressing with a style and a shape to suit every figure. But fancy a change? Just turn the page...

10 take on glam gold

Mix black with molten metallics and you'll have all the sparkle you need to shine through Christmas for any occasion

The use of imperatives ('mix black...') together with the direct address of 'you' ('you'll have all the sparkle you need') make it clear to the reader that this is glamour presented in the context of necessary advice; the reference to body shape ('a style and shape to suit every figure') is implicitly evaluative, encoding the assumption that performing glamour as an older woman needs to take into account the constraints of a 'deficient body' (Bartky 1990: 29). Furthermore, the women used in the feature are not models but "real" women, whose names, ages and professions are shown as captions underneath their photograph. Each identifying caption also has a headline which serves to explain the choice of dress, often relating it implicitly to an aspect of body shape:

Flattering Curvy Cut

As worn by Saskia Osmond-Evans, 36, senior PR manager for Evans

So forgiving...The shift for all figures

As worn by Orla Dunn, 51, mother to two boys, aged 15 and 17

The procedural nature of these statements, together with evaluative lexis such as 'flattering' and 'forgiving', carry the suggestion of bodily imperfections needing to be disguised, further reinforcing the overall context of modified glamour. Thus different textual and visual elements work to construct an interpretation of glamour which is permissible because it is anchored in, and modified by, the traditional domains of older femininity - home and family - from which sexuality is absent. The assumed interdependence of older femininity and domesticity is present throughout the Christmas editions of both *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home*, where female celebrities such as Kirstie Allsop (41), Julia Bradbury (42) and Fern Britton (55) are shown glamorously dressed but positioned by the accompanying text as sources of commonsense female wisdom, sharing festive tips, advice and plans with the reader.

The survey of these magazines, albeit on a small scale, illustrates the inherent ambivalence in the way older women are represented as well as the powerful influence of cultural expectations governing standards of acceptable older femininity. The embedded nature of these cultural conventions, defined by ‘the watchwords of attractive older femininity... decorum, poise, elegance and grace’ (Railton and Watson 2012: 200) are thrown into sharper relief by the semiotic conventions of Christmas and summer holidays, in which discourses of glamour and display predominate, and cultural focus on appearance and the body intensifies as a result. Older women are generally absent from the fashion pages of magazines with a younger age-profile, where the feminine ideal is assumed to be youthful, based on sexualised glamour and overt display. Furthermore, the presence of older women in a number of special features often serves to reinforce the narrative of youthfulness as the ideal, so that even an article ostensibly celebrating age, such as the feature on Debbie Harry, is based on (often covert) ageist evaluations which reinforce the negative comparison between the “then” of her youthful prime and the “now” of her mature years, resulting in a portrayal of ageing femininity which is at best ambivalent. In choosing how to represent older women, all the magazines surveyed have a series of balances to achieve; the youth-oriented discourses of *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* must accommodate the discourses of older femininity in order to deliver balanced appeal to their readership. Magazines with an older profile such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home* must present a realistic yet still aspirational portrayal of older femininity. However, it seems that even in publications with an older readership there is a limited repertoire of ageing femininities offered to readers, which, as Caldas-Coulthard (1996) observes, are drawn from a shared –and limited - cultural comfort zone in which older women are allowed to be wise (i.e. the agony aunt Irma Kurtz (78)); professional commentators (i.e. Carol Vorderman (54)); icons (Debbie Harry (68)); survivors (i.e. Dawn French (54)); intellectual role models (i.e. Joan Bakewell (82)); even beautiful (i.e. Helen Mirren (69)), but always subject to the complex balance of effort and restraint (Railton and Watson 2012:200) which describes the stringent and contradictory cultural “rules” imposed on older women, particularly in the domain of appearance. As illustrated by the feature on Nigella Lawson, it seems that older women are allowed – even expected - to be glamorous, but in a way which is carefully mitigated and desexualised. The next section continues the exploration of cultural rules by investigating cultural/media responses to a group of women who transgress them.

7.3 The “rules” of ageing femininity: acceptable transgressions

As discussed above, and also as Railton and Watson (2012) argue, cultural requirements which determine wider expectations of what is considered an acceptable way to perform ageing femininity are grounded in a complex series of contradictory balances: acknowledgement of chronological age but concealment of its visible signs; continuous -but discreet- body maintenance to support the performance of femininity but not sexiness; clothing choices which avoid age-related stereotypes of ‘frumpiness’ as well as the territory of overt display which is often negatively evaluated in public and private discourses through fixed expressions such as ‘mutton dressed as lamb’ (see also chapter 5 of this study). Railton and Watson’s (2012) analysis of Madonna documents the powerfully negative evaluations she receives from the media precisely because she is considered to transgress the rules of ageing femininity:

... by flouting the censorious obligation to appear decorous and natural, Madonna fails to perform aging femininity appropriately, properly, or correctly (2012: 201-202)

The texts analysed in this section, a television documentary and series of connected blogs, further explore the operation of the rules of ageing femininity, providing an interesting counterpoint to Railton and Watson’s work and to the analysis in the previous sections of this chapter.

September 17th 2012 saw the screening of a documentary entitled ‘Fabulous Fashionistas’, produced for Channel 4 by the documentary maker Sue Bourne which focused on six women ranging aged 73 - 90, selected by the producer because of a shared attitude to ageing and appearance, and to a way of performing their ageing femininity.



(left-right): Sue, Daphne, Lady Trumpington, Jean, Gillian, Bridget

As the introductory voice-over stated:

...this Cutting Edge documentary explores the art of ageing with six extraordinary women who have an average age of 80 and who are determined to look fabulous, have fun and redefine old age (17th September 2013)

Through their clothing choices, appearance and lifestyles all the women in some way transgress the rules of ageing femininity, what Sadie Wearing terms ‘chronological decorum and propriety’ (2007: 298). As a review in *The Telegraph* comments:

“I think I would say I’m a bit unusual for my age” says Jean Woods, whose Mary Quant-style fringe, statement jewellery and Doc Marten boots would give even the most fashion-conscious Hoxtonite a run for their money (Rachel Ward, *The Telegraph* (online version) 18th September 2013)

With the possible exception of Lady Trumpington, the clothes they wear, as the review indicates, are colourful and often eccentric, ranging from unusual and distinctive to theatrically outrageous, in the case of the artist Sue Kreitzman, who describes dressing herself each day as an act of ‘curation’. She states ‘I hate beige.... I don’t wear beige it might kill you’, using beige as a metonym for the (well documented) invisibility which often accompanies old age. Coupland comments on ‘this unwatchability of the old...[which] contrasts with the ‘watchability’, and the obsessive watching, of the young’ (2013: 5); the Fashionistas make themselves unrepentantly visible and in doing so, create an ‘arena of visibility’ (Woodward 1999: ix) but also of display, attributes more commonly associated with youth, which challenge the conventions of ageing femininity and which, as the journalist Florence Keyworth (1982) commented, have become synonymous with invisibility⁵⁹. Yet this is not the ‘youthfulness as masquerade’ described by Woodward (1991: 147) nor the ‘girling’ of older women (Wearing 2007: 294) which underlies many discourses of popular culture claiming to reframe ageing on the basis of reformulated chronological age markers, (i.e. ‘40 is the new 50’ etc) (see section 7.1.2 above). None of the women attempts to disguise her ageing appearance; their faces are visibly marked with the lines and wrinkles of age, and with one exception, all have grey hair. Indeed Daphne, who at 85 is Britain’s oldest model, attributes her success as a model to her trademark long silver-grey hair. The Fashionistas step outside the culturally defined paradigms of age-appropriate appearance and behaviour

⁵⁹ Keyworth’s observation was brought about by her subjective experience as a journalist then in her mid 50s, sent on a reporting job with a group of young male journalists who were making sexist comments about young women passers-by, and her realization that they were not doing this to shock her; more disconcertingly ‘they had not noticed me. I was invisible’ (1982: 133)

and are widely applauded for it, although the explanation Railton and Watson offer for the negative evaluation of Madonna could equally apply to them:

a very visible discursive clash between two demands of aging femininity: the demand to achieve an appearance of youthfulness in the disavowal of one's real age and the demand to act responsibly, moderately, and with a sense of decorum in the accomplishment of that appearance (2012: 203)

They do not seek to make themselves into 'ghastly simulacra of youthful bodies' (Greer 1991: 266), however they incorporate some of the attributes of youth into their age identity, doing so in a way which is seemingly untrammelled by concerns about decorum. As 87 year-old choreographer and dancer Gilly Lynne comments:

I like wearing really short skirts and sometimes I think what must people think look at that poor old 87 year-old woman.... I don't give a toss

Similarly, Lady Trumpington's now well-known two-fingered gesture to another peer in the House of Lords whilst clearly flying in the face of decorum, was treated indulgently and even positively evaluated in media commentary which described her as 'formidable' (*Daily Mail* online 15th November 2013).

The question remains as to why the Fashionistas are celebrated rather than censured and the question itself is a catalyst for the complicated and often contradictory relationship which the media, as the mirror of wider culture, conducts with ageing femininity. The additional factor of celebrity appears to mobilise, intensify and polarise attitudes and evaluations which already form part of the collective cultural sediment. The Fashionistas phenomenon can be viewed and perhaps interpreted in the context of how, and in what way, they both accept and resist ageing. The review of *The Fabulous Fashionistas* documentary characterises it as an acceptance narrative:

... their strong life purpose was matched by an acceptance and embracement of old age (Rachel Ward, *The Telegraph* (online version) 18th September 2013)

However closer examination suggests that the Fashionistas have actually constructed a way of performing ageing femininity based on a complex balance of acceptance and fierce resistance. Significantly, they show the ageing female body as a site of continuing identity development; they have all either reinvented themselves in deep old age, choosing to capitalise on personal tragedy, moments of revelation and opportunities, or as with the choreographer Gilly Lynne, have continued to pursue professional lives with energy seemingly undiminished by age. They personify Woodward's call for 'a creative female body

that is not post-reproductive but productive, a new kind of body in older age' (2006: 170) and this may in part account for the fascination they hold for the media and the wider public. They resist the process of ageing whilst not attempting to deny or disguise its visible signs. It is notable that the language used by all of them when they talk about ageing is that of physical, visceral resistance:

I think you have to pit yourself if you like against the ageing process and you just mustn't allow it in

the minute you give an inch life or illness will take a mile

The fierce determination in the lexical choices ('pit yourself', 'give an inch') indicates the powerfully felt need for unrelenting vigilance against age as the enemy of energy and agency, not as the thief of beauty. They do not appear to lament the loss of youthful appearance, so in that sense there is acceptance of the process of ageing; theirs is a more fundamental battle, waged against invisibility as the taken-for-granted companion of age, which drives 'the wish of our visual culture to erase the female body from view' (Woodward 2006: 163). In an earlier paper, Woodward remarks that historically

younger people (and older people who deny their own aging) have functioned as mirrors to older women, reflecting them back half their size (1999: xii)

The Fashionistas' pursuit of visibility is based on the expression of their individual style, a way of not being 'disappeared' or diminished by the gaze of youth, and as such is a product of their subjective gaze, rather than of the imperatives of the 'gaze of the Other'. Thus they appear to succeed in liberating themselves from the remorseless appraisal of the youthful gaze and the male gaze, and in doing so become their own mirrors. A final significant component in what has made this cohort of women fascinating rather than freakish is the absence of sexualisation in their display, a dimension which seems to underlie much of the collective unease that surrounds evaluations of ageing women such as Madonna (cf. Railton and Watson 2012). The Fashionistas, together with other positively evaluated exemplary women such as Joanna Lumley and Helen Mirren, successfully perform gendered ageing because sexuality is absent (as with the Fashionistas) or sufficiently dialled down (as with Mirren and Lumley). This further illustrates one of the rules which, according to Anne Karpf, operates with regard to older models. She writes:

the more you dig, the clearer it becomes that, most of the time, a strict set of rules operates.... You can get work as a model if you're older as long as you're not too sexy (*The Guardian Weekend*, 22nd February 2014)

Writing as a feminist, Woodward (2006) argues that:

the feminist aging body, entailing gender and sexuality as the continuing site of identity, need not be a contradiction in terms. (2006: 177)

In practice, however, analysis of the Fashionistas phenomenon and of media evaluations of other exemplary women suggests that this is some way off as a cultural paradigm for ageing femininity.

7.4 Summary

The Fashionistas undoubtedly present a genuine challenge to some of the cultural strictures shaping the way ageing femininity is represented in that they show a different way of ageing which, to paraphrase Woodward (2006) has forced the cultural image-repertoire to become supple enough to accommodate them (2006: 170). In other ways it could be argued that the counter-discourses they represent are situated at some distance from the day-to-day experience of many older women who remain deeply constrained by the gaze of the Other, as exemplified by the fourth-age participants in this study. The presence of such extraordinary older women may even symbolise another set of expectations to live up to and another source of pressure on “ordinary” women who, as Anne Karpf commented in an interview on Radio 4’s *The Today Programme*, (29th April 2014), might actively choose ‘the elasticated waistband’. Grenier’s notion of the ‘unrelenting body’ (2012: 92) to characterise ‘older people who achieve extraordinary feats, while hailed in the media as aspirational role models’ (ibid), is exemplified by the Fashionistas and increasingly emphasised as part of the cultural narrative of successful ageing into later life (see Grenier 2012, also chapter 2 of this study). Whilst the presence of discourses which challenge the nature of ‘what-goes-without-saying’ (Barthes 1957 (2009): xix) suggest that culture’s visual vocabulary may be evolving, the cultural context within which women’s age identity must be constructed, remains structured by the polarities of youth and age (see Woodward 1991), so that attitudes towards older women are seemingly still fundamentally defined by the ‘cleaver-sharp binary between beauty and the so-called ravages of time...[which] is encoded daily in the stories and advertisements in the mass media’ (Woodward 1999: xvii). Thus it could still be argued that the media’s relationship with older women remains at best ambivalent and worst one of excoriating judgement.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This final chapter outlines the principal findings of this study, and, in the light of these, consider to what extent and in what ways the research questions have been addressed by the analysis of the data. It draws a number of conclusions and sets out some future research objectives.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the relationship between the private voices of individuals' lived experience of ageing, and the public discourses of gender and age(ing) generated by the media and beauty/cosmetic industries, examining the inseparable nature of this relationship and the reciprocal impact of one upon the other. I have sought to show how, in the current cultural environment, the language used *about* ageing women directly influences the language used *by* the ageing women in my study and how, for these women, performing femininity on an ageing body as Wearing (2007) contends, is a risky and uncertain enterprise, involving the need to balance age and gender identities. This undertaking is dominated by the mirror moment, both in a literal sense as the vehicle of subjective evaluation, and as a symbol of what is reflected back to women by wider culture's evaluative gaze.

The analysis has focused primarily on mid-life women; the mid-life is a transitional phase in which the values of youthfulness and the requirements of (older) age must be navigated, but which as discussed in chapter 2, has been subject to cultural reconceptualisation. The 'new middle age' as described by Featherstone and Hepworth (1988 (1991): 384) has become an extended, fluid period in the lifecourse, no longer rigidly delineated by chronology, and redefined as a time of personal growth and self-development. Significantly, the redefined mid-life is more closely aligned visually and discursively to youth(fulness) than age, shaped by powerful media/advertising discourses of body maintenance and improvement. Thus not only has old age been pushed back, but more flexible patterns of employment and career development mean that more women are working for longer; retirement, as Twigg (2010) observes, is no longer the social/economic and chronological fixed point it once was. These changing social conditions mean that cultural and individual expectations about ageing and the meanings assigned to age have also shifted, in ways which make ageing an even more

complex process, particularly for women; paradoxically, the process of (successful) ageing in the current cultural context is perceived - and accepted – as being contingent on maintaining the values and appearance of youthfulness.

Women remain primary targets of the discourses of consumerism which as Giddens (1991) and Gill (2007, 2009) argue, characterise post-modern, postfeminist society. The media and women's magazines in particular continue to be important sites for the construction of feminine identity through discourses of fashion, beauty, youth and the importance of body work, which historically have 'rigorously excluded age' (Twigg 2010: 483) and in which 'aging ...has become a disruption in the visual field' (ibid: 475). Such perceptions and ways of operating have been challenged by new consumption communities of Third Age people who do not identify themselves as old, and see no reason why they should be represented as such in mass-media discourses. Thus the ideological difficulty of accommodating the ageing female body and the threat it represents to culturally acceptable models of femininity whilst fulfilling the (lucrative) needs of a growing cohort of mid-life consumers, remains one of the principal challenges for beauty and cosmetic corporations as well as the media and advertising industries. In the current postfeminist media culture, media discourses as encapsulations of cultural attitudes, remain profoundly ambivalent about ageing. As discussed in chapter 1, older women do have greater visibility in public discourses – although it could be argued are still under-represented along with other categories of 'otherness' such as non-heteronormativity and ethnicity. However, role models of successful ageing held up to the public gaze are often presented in terms of prescribed identity categories, carefully modified by visual and textual semiotic resources (see chapter 7): e.g. Helen Mirren (acceptable glamour); Mary Berry (domestic wisdom); Judi Dench (national treasure); The Fabulous Fashionistas (acceptable transgression); Hillary Clinton (woman – grandmother – in a man's world). These women, who are still subject to judgement-by-appearance as the commentary about Clinton in chapter 1 attests, are evaluated as acceptable role models of ageing femininity because they achieve, in their different ways, the complex series of balances required to conform to what Watson and Railton (2012) argue are cultural 'rules' governing the performance of ageing femininity: e.g. investment in the appearance without "trying too hard"; maintaining youthfulness but not sexual desirability; acknowledging personal age whilst disguising/resisting its visible signs. The public judgements reserved for

ageing women who fail to conform to these rules are exemplified in the opprobrium directed at Mary Beard (see 7.1.1).

The analytical approach has used three distinct but interconnected datasets to address the research questions: spoken data from a series of qualitative interviews represents the private voices of ageing. Public discourses are explored through two datasets: selected anti-ageing skincare advertisements; and a range of media texts. The structuring of the datasets, based on the relational-dialectical view of discourse offered by Fairclough's model of CDA, has enabled the relationship between public discourses and the language of the private voices of the women in this study to be analysed systematically. The spoken data, analysed in chapters 4 and 5, provides a unique and rich corpus of commentary on ageing which has primarily been used to address research questions (i) and (ii) (see chapter 1), seeking to explore the language of women's subjective experience of ageing and the ageing appearance, and through analysis of the linguistic strategies, choices and resources which constitute participants' talk to uncover insights about individual experiences of ageing. The findings show many commonalities; for these women ageing is a complex, non-unitary and universally unwelcome experience, and whilst ageing is experienced in a highly personal and individual way, there are nonetheless striking similarities in their perception and articulation of their experiences. Participants seek to make sense of this most amorphous phenomenon by conceptualising it in terms of different dimensions of ageing which require different evaluations and differing degrees of dis/alignment and engagement. This complicated positioning work is realised through diverse linguistic strategies such as pronoun shifts, specific positively/negatively evaluative lexical choices and intensification/ minimisation features. Analysis shows that the process of ageing is indivisible from the appearance, and the mirror moment is central to the way all female participants irrespective of age, interpret and evaluate their ageing. As discussed in chapter 5, it is clear that ageing is most immediately experienced in the mirror and its lens forms a complex bridge between the cultural and subjective gaze, and between external and inner worlds and the different dimensions of identity they represent; once again, pronoun shifts express these complex shifts in evaluative gaze. The linguistic construction of the mirror moment is rooted in the body, characterised by language of deconstruction and scrutiny, through which without exception, all bodily changes are ascribed to the ageing process and negatively evaluated as a result,

often using powerfully intensified language. The recurrence of 'should' in many participants' accounts encodes their complex reactions to their own ageing: the obligation to conform to cultural requirements of the ageing female appearance; the tension between subjective and external gaze; awareness of the constant presence of 'the gaze of the Other' (Bartky 1990: 38), whether that is the gaze of men, of youth, or as seems increasingly the case, the female gaze turned on other women. A consequence of this is that despite their negative evaluations of cultural attitudes, and protestations of acceptance of their own ageing, and the rise of positive counter-discourses of ageing, none of the female participants is prepared to step outside the cultural rules which still drive the feminine duty of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 2009: 19).

Research question (iii) concerns how ageing women are represented in media and advertising discourses and this is addressed through analysis of the anti-ageing skincare advertisements and selected media texts in chapters 6 and 7, using a postfeminist framework of interpretation. Principal findings suggest a number of common attitudes encoded within these public discourses. Fundamental media ambivalence towards female ageing is expressed through the ways in which older women are represented textually and visually, and in the contradictory nature of age-related discourses. For example, menopause is discursively constructed as the signifier of the cultural age-as-decline narrative, but sits alongside success-based models of ageing described by Grenier's (2012) in terms of the relentlessly active and productive body; similarly exhortations to maintain a youthful appearance by whatever means have equal prominence with public judgements of women who have been "found out" as having had cosmetic surgery. The absence of representations of older women in magazines targeting younger consumers attests to the generalised cultural unease about ageing. There are few references to or features about, older women; often those that are to be found whilst ostensibly celebrating older women, in reality encode highly ambivalent evaluations of ageing through linguistic strategies such as verbal qualifiers ('still') and visual constructions of the notion of pinnacle and decline, as exemplified in the article about Debbie Harry (see 7.2). The highly sexualised nature of representations of young women discussed by Gill (2007, see 2.0 above) serves to highlight further the exclusions of older women. Publications with an older readership present carefully modified constructions of femininity to readers based around the cultural 'rules' of ageing femininity (see above) in which

sexuality has little place – often accomplished by locating older women in the domestic sphere. Multimodal analysis of skincare advertisements suggests that without exception the process of ageing is negatively constructed through a combination of compositional, visual and verbal elements which, by contrast, glorify the attributes of youthfulness as the desired state.

It is important to acknowledge that research question (iv), which questions what cultural insights may be gained from comparing representations of women versus men in public discourses, has only been partially explored. The number of male participants included in the interviews was not sufficient to provide a meaningful basis of comparison, and similarly the small number of male-targeted skincare advertisements and media texts included in the analysis has been on too small a scale to have fully addressed this research question. Nonetheless, valuable insights have been gained, which demonstrate a very different - and gendered – communicative approach in male-targeted communication versus that of women, and which provide a promising basis for further research.

Thus in conclusion, based on analysis undertaken in this study, it can be argued that for female participants the process of ageing appears more, not less difficult in a postfeminist environment which, it seems, serves only to intensify the uncertain status of older women and in which the reciprocal impact of ageing on femininity – linguistically, socially and emotionally - indexes a double powerlessness and lack of visibility (see 2.2.1). Laura Bates's 2014 book *Everyday Sexism* supports this view, arguing that the sexism which is normalised in many women's day-to-day experience intersects with other categories of prejudice, such as age, to create 'double discrimination' (2014: 276). Cultural attitudes towards age(ing) remain fundamentally gendered, lacking sufficient ideological suppleness to accept that an ageing female body can continue to be a site of femininity and desirability, or that there is a notion of femininity which can accommodate the ageing body. Not only that, but the hardening female gaze perpetuates the gendered nature of ageing; women are increasingly surveyors of other women, compounding historical (male-generated) perceptions of women as legitimate objects of the gaze. Woodward asks

can we invent in our culture new meanings of old age so that we need not fight this battle with ourselves and others? Can we imagine mirrors which reflect other images of old age back to us? (1991: 70)

Over twenty years later these questions still remain largely unaddressed by contemporary culture and these issues continue to challenge prevailing age and gender ideologies in very significant ways.

In terms of future research directions, this thesis seeks to make a continuing contribution to the increasing interest in the relationship between ageing and gender, and, as stated in chapter 2, part of this involves establishing a foundational body of literature to bring much needed theoretical perspectives to this neglected area. Not only that, the work undertaken here could have a meaningful application in the wider environment of advertising, in raising awareness amongst brand owners and advertisers of language used about and by ageing women. Thus this study represents only a beginning; many further research directions suggest themselves. I have acknowledged the necessarily limited nature of the interview sample, and in particular the lack of a meaningful male perspective; I have also acknowledged the effect of the interview situation on participants' evaluations of their ageing and appearance (see 3.1 above) in that by inviting women to reflect on these issues they are likely to problematise them, for reasons of personal modesty as well as an assumed correlation between honesty and negative evaluation. However, this in itself can be seen as symptomatic of the pressures on ageing women of the cultural model of youth=beauty, and reinforces the importance of continuing work in this area. Future research would seek to broaden investigation of the linguistic impact of gender and age(ing): considering different categories of 'otherness' such as race and sexual orientation; building on the (limited) insights gained into male ageing by undertaking an equivalent study focusing on mid-life men - given that cultural attitudes to masculinity appear to be shifting, particularly as metrosexual men age, and more sophisticated male-targeted anti-ageing products become available. This which would offer a more meaningful comparison between attitudes to female versus male ageing; building on work already undertaken on gendered discourses in the workplace (see Baxter 2011, Litosseliti and Leadbeater 2011) by incorporating discourses of age(ing) as an area of investigation; and finally developing the work begun in this study on postfeminist discourses as a means of theorising the experiences of older women.

APPENDIX I

Linguistic classifications for analysis of interview data

In outlining the application of their system of appraisal to written and spoken data, Martin and White (2005) identify a comprehensive series of classifications for the linguistic realisations of **Attitude**, **Engagement** and **Graduation** (see chapter 3 of this thesis). As chapter 3 discusses, the semantic domain of **Attitude** is broken down into three sub-systems: *Affect*, *Judgement* and *Appreciation*, each of which is realised by a range of linguistic features and structures. I have drawn on Martin and White's system of classification in order to develop the framework for classifying **Attitude** which I have applied to my own data (see below), also incorporating Martin and White's groupings of emotion into three major sets: un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction (2005: 49) and their cline scale of emotional intensity: low/median/high. The classification framework is illustrated with examples from the spoken data in my study.

Attitude – ‘ways of feeling’ (ibid: 42)

(i) *Affect*: registers positive/negative feelings, resources for expressing emotion

Classification	Positive/negative	Realisation	Typology	Grading
Affect as process - affective mental - affective behavioural	positive	e.g. ‘the one thing I do like about getting older..’	satisfaction	median
	negative	e.g. ‘there’s a lot of acceptance in there but if I go out of the range for me I get upset e.g. ‘I was appalled by Felicity Kendall how much work she’d had done’	unhappiness dissatisfaction	median high
Affect as ‘quality’ (i.e. adverbial/adjectival modifiers)	negative	e.g. ‘I know it’s [sc. ageing] going to be sad	Insecurity	Median
Affect as ‘comment’ (i.e. modal adjunct)	negative	e.g. ‘ unfortunately I look in the mirror and go oooh dear there’s another wrinkle’	Dissatisfaction	High

Table 3: Example linguistic classifications - *Affect*

(ii) *Judgement*: deals with attitudes towards people and behaviour

Martin and White sub-divide judgements into two categories: those dealing with ‘judgments of esteem’ and those concerned with ‘judgements of sanction’ (ibid: 52). ‘Social sanction’, and its illustrative realisations of ‘veracity’ and ‘propriety’ can be understood as being concerned with ‘edicts, decrees, rules and regulations’ (ibid: 54) and is the category I have applied to my data. Martin and White argue that there is a further level of delicacy in the analysis of resources of judgement which maps the intersection between types of judgement and certain modalisations, i.e. modulations of obligation can be related to judgements of propriety, and modalisations of probability to judgements of veracity, as shown below:

Social sanction	Positive (praise)	Negative (condemn)	Modalisation
Veracity (i.e. ‘how truthful?’)	e.g. ‘most of my friends don’t lie and they don’t have the frozen look’	e.g. ‘I know that there’s a lot of crap in some of these ads and so I actually don’t believe in a lot of these ads’ e.g. ‘she’s giving a false impression and that’s wrong ’	probability: e.g. ‘she’s certainly has some work done’
Propriety (i.e. ‘how far beyond reproach?’)	e.g. ‘she’s aged gracefully I doubt she’s had any work done’	e.g. ‘I think don’t look like mutton dressed as lamb that’s something I would worry about’	Obligation: e.g. ‘in theory I think cosmetic surgery’s a bad thing and that we should all be happy with who we are’ ‘women are expected to be kind of smooth and beautiful’

Table 4: Example linguistic classifications - *Judgement*

(iii) *Appreciation*: adapting Martin and White’s definition, this has been interpreted for the purposes of this study primarily as aesthetically-based evaluation of people. Two of the illustrative realisations of *appreciation* they identify - reaction and valuation - have been used in the framework outlined in table 7 below. In addition Martin and White suggest that the *appreciation* framework can be interpreted in terms of the metafunctions (see chapter 3 of this study), a level of analytical delicacy which I have found useful in distinguishing between the nature and source of aesthetic evaluations:

Type of appreciation	Positive	Negative	Metafunction
Reaction: i.e. ‘did I like it?’	e.g. ‘she’s a beautiful looking woman’	e.g. ‘it was the most horrific spectacle ...she looked like a skeleton ’	Interpersonal
Valuation: i.e. how worthwhile, how “worthy”	e.g. ‘old people are seen as a burden on society once they’re past their usefulness ’	e.g. ‘I think this person’s completely irrelevant ...I don’t think she’s ever made anything of her life ’	Ideational

Table 5: Example linguistic resources of *Appreciation*

Engagement and graduation: intersubjective stance, alignment and solidarity

Martin and White explain **engagement** in terms of ‘the linguistic resources by which speakers/writers adopt a stance towards the value positions being referenced by the text and with respect to those they address’ (2005: 92). As chapter 3 discusses, this approach, which is also taken in this thesis, presumes that all utterances are in some way, to some degree, stanced. Martin and White take a ‘dialogistic perspective’ to their analysis of **engagement**, arguing that the speaker/writer enters a relationship with the ‘other voices’ (ibid: 93) which make up the discursive context for any utterance, either acknowledging and positioning themselves in relation to this wider discursive community (heteroglossia), or choosing not to reference it (monoglossia). Thus Martin and White’s framework for **engagement** and **graduation** is concerned both with specific language features (i.e. hedges and intensifiers) and dialogistic locutions (i.e. modal realisations) by which speakers/writers align/disalign themselves with regard to ‘prior utterances in the same sphere’ (ibid: 93) and express the strength of their positions.

Martin and White identify a complex and highly detailed taxonomy of resources realising intersubjective stance, and whilst not all have been applied to my data, the framework I have developed, based on Martin and White’s work, allows for a sufficiently fine-grained level of analysis. Although classifications for engagement and graduation are shown separately for reasons of clarity, gradability is a defining property of all attitudinal meanings and is, as Martin and White state, ‘central to the appraisal system’ (2005: 136).

Engagement	Linguistic realisations
Disclaim (i.e. the textual voice positions itself as rejecting other contrary positions)	e.g. ‘you don’t need to put bits of plastic into yourself to look younger’
Entertain (i.e. the speaker presents the proposition as on of a range of possible positions, thereby entertaining dialogic alternatives)	e.g. ‘ in my view she’s trying too hard’ ‘ I believe happiness comes from within’ ‘age is just a number I believe ’
Attribute (i.e. the speaker presents the proposition as originating in an external voice)	e.g. ‘ they they just try and blast you with research’
Dialogic status: monoglossia i.e. ‘bare assertions’, heteroglossia i.e. referencing/acknowledging other points of view via: - modal auxiliaries - modal adjuncts - mental verb structures expressing epistemic judgements	e.g. ‘my expectation is firmly that I will not age’ ‘old age starts now in your 80s and not a minute before’ e.g. ‘ I might one day consider it [sc. plastic surgery]’ e.g. ‘that’s why I’m definitely fighting ageing’ e.g. ‘ I think I am remarkably accepting of my appearance’

Table 6: Example linguistic classifications - **Engagement**

Graduation	Linguistic realisation
Force i.e. up/down scaling of intensification: - qualities - verbal processes	e.g. extremely/rather attractive, looking relatively young e.g. ‘ I really want to fit in to society’s definition of beauty’
Focus i.e: Sharpening via boosters and intensifiers Softening via hedges and minimisers	e.g. ‘she’s still a real beauty’ e.g. kind of/sort of/rather

Table 7: Example linguistic classifications - **Graduation**

Sample analytical grid applied to individual interview texts

Object of evaluation	Appraiser	Positive/negative	Sub-system	Typology	Lexical realisation	Prosodic realisation	Graduation & Engagement
Professional status as an older woman	self	Strongly neg	Affect	Insecurity, dissatisfaction	Lexis: <i>dismissed</i> ; <i>irrelevant</i> ; negated mental processes I <i>don't feel</i> respected'	Highly negative expression of her feelings about the value of her experience	Unhedged declarations I <i>don't feel</i> ; use of minimisers and vague language to diffuse intensity, 'kind of irrelevant'
Appearance – grey hair	self	Strongly neg	Affect	Insecurity, unhappiness	Lexis: <i>give in</i> ; negated mental process verbs, I <i>can't bear</i> it; modals of obligation, you <i>just have to</i>	Strong statement of stance but also evidence of conflict re desire to give in to grey hair vs social pressure to resist, realised by vocabulary of defeat rather than acceptance	Upscaling of force via intensified language, <i>can't bear</i> ; use of modal signifies heteroglossic positioning, i.e with regard to conflicted feelings about other voices and opinions
Appearance – current vs appearance at age 27	self	neg	Appreciation	Reaction	Comparative language based on implied negative, you <i>weren't like this all your life</i>	Evidence that the ageing appearance is negatively evaluated against perceived physical optimum, signified by negative loading of <i>this</i>	2 nd person pronoun suggests distancing strategy and implies the external gaze i.e. you weren't like this....

Table 8: Example attitude analysis

Example visual communication analysis: L'Oréal anti-ageing skincare advertisements

Text	Metafunction	Description	Application to visual composition	Specific realisation	Analysis
L'Oréal Men 'ice cool eye roll on'	Ideational	represents aspects of the external world and their connection to people experiencing them	illustrated by verbal resources working to support the visual	e.g. verbal headline <i>last night ?Never happened</i> positioned across male social actor's face	The powerful sexual undertone supports stereotypes of traditional heterosexual masculinity to compensate for the historically female domain in which the ad operates
L'Oréal women's ad 'collagen micro-pulse eye'	Interpersonal	represents 'the social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object presented' (1996, 2006: 42)	e.g. illustrated by the gaze of the social actor	e.g. the lack of direct gaze in the female targeted L'Oréal ad vs the direct gaze in the male ad	In female ad this connotes lack of engagement with viewer, encodes stereotypical attitudes towards femininity (passive and objectified) vs masculinity as agentive and engaging
	Textual	concerned with flow of information and coherence	illustrated by compositional structure, use of typefaces etc	e.g. left-right compositional structure in female L'Oréal ad which equates to given-new	composition as an ideological statement: placing the female social actor in the given zone normalises the idealised representation of femininity

Table 9: example visual communication analysis

APPENDIX II:

Stimulus material for qualitative interviews

Images of older women and men



APPENDIX II (cont'd)

Stimulus material for qualitative interviews

Skin care advertisements and media articles



APPENDIX II (cont'd)

Interview discussion guide

1. Intro
 - recap project objectives
 - recap purpose and nature of interviews (i.e understanding more about ageing, conversational rather than formal)
 - reassure re confidentiality
2. Warm-up and orientation
 - introductions, share personal/family information as ice-breaker

[show selection of newspaper and magazine articles to start the discussion]
3. Public discourses
 - views on how they think society views/talks about ageing generally
 - are men and women judged differently as they get older – why/not
 - how important/significant is age/ing in current culture
 - is there a point/are there contexts in which age/ing is deemed a particularly good/bad thing by society

[show pix of older women and men]

 - what do you think of the women/men portrayed
 - do any or them represent positive/negative role models of ageing
4. Personal discourses
 - how do you feel you are viewed/judged as you get older
 - if differently, how/in what ways, by whom
 - has the way you feel about yourself changed as you've got older, if so how/in what ways (elicit physical/appearance/emotional)
 - *linguistic*
 - as you get older, do you notice a difference in the way other people refer to you
 - if so, how do you feel about this
 - are you aware of referring to yourself/talking about yourself differently
 - how do other people in your life talk about growing older
 - *physical/biological*
 - what physical/mental signs of ageing do you notice in yourself
 - how do you feel about this
 - did/do you have fears/expectations about growing older
 - how does this relate to your actual experience
 - what do you think about cosmetic surgery
 - have you ever had it or considered it, why/not
 - what for you is successful ageing
 - *lifestage*
 - at what point in your life did/will you consider yourself to be old
 - at what age do you consider that old age begins and why

- thinking about different decades of your life, how did you feel as you reached each one
- at what point in your life have you felt most/least content
- what, if any, is the role of age in this
- thinking about growing older, what are positive/negative role models for you in your own life and why

5. Media

[show selection of skincare ads]

- do you use any of the products featured in these ads
- why/not
- what do you think of these ads
- which, if any, do you feel are relevant to you, why/not
- do you notice any difference in the ads aimed at women versus those which target men
- do they influence the way you feel about yourself
- if so, in what way

APPENDIX III

Transcription conventions

Silverman (1993) argues that the way in which a given piece of spoken data can be transcribed depends on what the analysis of that data is trying to achieve. My approach to the interview data in this study has been to focus on its linguistic structure and features and their relationship to wider socio-cultural structures, (see chapter 3) rather than a Conversational Analysis (CA) approach which examines the structural organisation of the talk itself. This is reflected in a simplified transcription approach, which treats each interview account as a narrative as Silverman (1993) suggests, aiming to capture the specific language features of individual discourse which express evaluation, and how these contribute to prosodic realisations of attitude across larger chunks of discourse, from which attitudinal stances are constructed. The following transcription conventions are based on Silverman 1993: 118), using examples from the data in my study:

Transcription symbol	Example	Function
-	I: if I show you this lady who's just- C: -yeah she's just yes	Single dashes, one at the end of a line and one at the beginning, indicates sequential talk with no gap between speakers
(.)	C: in traditional societies there's still more respect for the elderly (.) but not in ours	A dot in parentheses indicates a short pause in talk, e.g. under one second
{	C: those kind of things suddenly I: {are brought home because you are people do look at you as old	The left bracket indicates the point at which the current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk, but the first speaker does not yield the turn
/	C: you're not going to go and have botox or all that sort of thing which is/ I: /or bring it on I want everything C: yes yeah	The forward slash indicates the point at which the current speaker is interrupted by another speaker and yields the turn
(())	I: how did your own mother deal with the ageing process C: ((exhales)) not very well	Double brackets contain various paralinguistic elements such as laughter, inhalations /exhalations, and gestures
[]	C: well she [sc. older model] looks magnificent	Editorial brackets contain author's comments and clarifications rather than transcriptions
(xxxx)	C: so I always remember 'cos (xxxx) a little quote and I keep that little quote	Parentheses containing a row of xxxs indicates the transcriber's inability to hear what was said
Word-	C: aged gracefully is quite h- how would you almost say aged gracefully	A word followed immediately by a dash indicates that the speaker has left the word uncompleted

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